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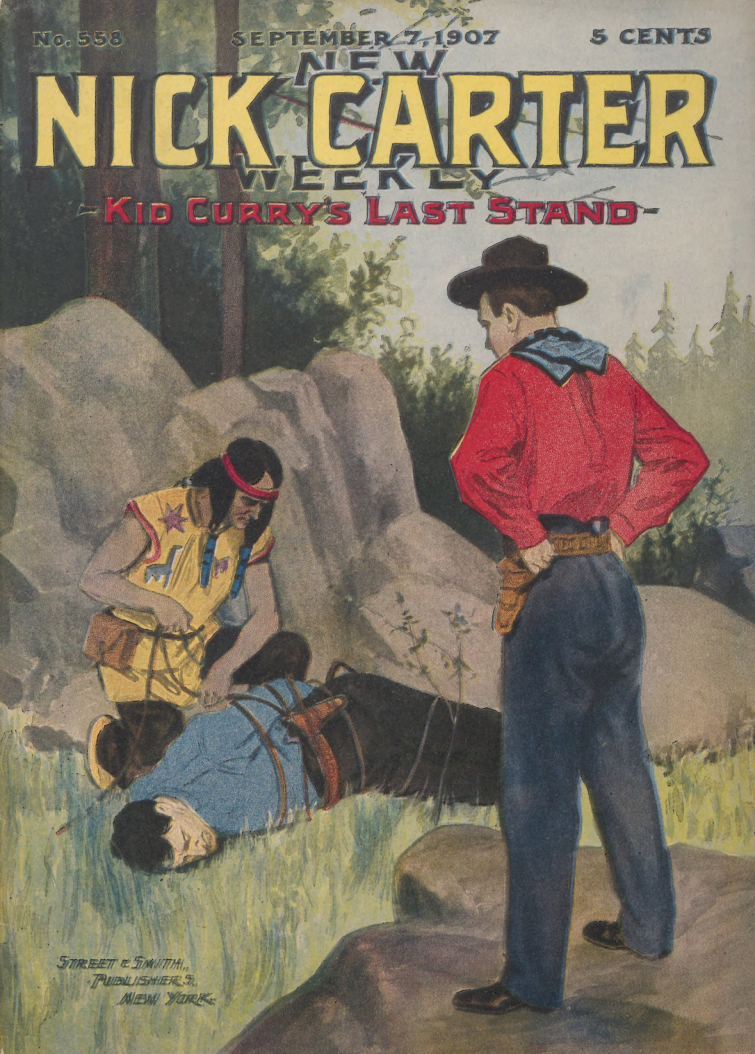
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

KID CURRY'S LAST STAND



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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Kid Curry's Last Stand;

OR,

NICK CARTER IN DANGEROUS SURROUNDINGS.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNACCOUNTABLE DISAPPEARANCE.

Nick Carter's first assistant, Chick, was seated in the detective's study one afternoon when Joseph entered the room and gave him a telegram which was as long as an ordinary letter, perhaps longer than most letters which pass through the mails.

The young detective opened it and spread it before him with some amazement at its length, which was, however, lost in the absorption he presently felt over its contents. It was as follows:

"CHICKERING CARTER, NEW YORK CITY.

"Your chief, Nick Carter, has been with us here about two weeks and has twice captured the famous outlaw known locally as Kid Curry, who has both times escaped the clutches of the law and is again at liberty. Last capture was made three days ago on the banks of the Missouri River some distance from this place. Curry, with a confederate who was captured with him at the time, was brought here to this place and put in jail, where a supposedly effectual guard was placed over him. The confederate was known by the name of Arizona. Carter has said that you and he both once knew Arizona by the name of Black Nevada when he was at or near Belmont, Nevada. Curry and Arizona have now escaped, and not only have they mysteriously disappeared from this region, but they seem to have left no trail behind them; at least there is not one that we are able to find and follow.

"Nick Carter has mysteriously disappeared at the same time, and it is supposed that the outlaws in some way managed to get him into their power and to take him away; why they should have done that is not known.

"It is supposed by some that Nick Carter discovered the escaping men at the time they were getting away and followed them, intending to communicate with us later by sending a message back here, or perhaps he thought that he could recapture the two men and bring them back.

"At all events, he has disappeared at the same time with the two outlaws, and now that twenty-four hours have elapsed since that occurrence, it is presumed that if they did not take him away forcibly with them, they have somehow succeeded in capturing him since their departure, thus preventing him from sending any messages back to us.

"The whole thing is so wrapped in mystery, and we find ourselves so unable to explain it, that we have deemed it wise to communicate with you at once, believ-

ing it to be our duty to invite you to come here to assist us in our efforts to find him and rescue him.

"During the intervening time before you can possibly reach this place no effort will be spared by the signers to find the detective, so it is possible that your journey out here will be for nothing, after all.

"We have evidence that Curry and Arizona had already completed extensive plans for the reorganization of a gang of outlaws, and that many men have been enlisted in their service. There was a small riot precipitated in this town recently when the 'Kid' was to be tried for murder, and we discovered then that the outlaw had already recruited many followers.

"We think it best that you should start at once for Montana, and if you will wire your reply immediately on receipt of this to Wallace Coburn at Fort Benton, he will wait there to receive it.

(Signed) "WALLACE COBURN,
"BOB COBURN,
"BILL COBURN,
"JIM THORNHILL,
"ALICK BLACK."

Chick read this telegraphic message through several times, for up to that moment he had no definite idea as to where Nick Carter was.

He knew, of course, that his chief was somewhere in Montana, but the last advices he had received from him were contained in a letter written from a ranch owned by one Major Corson, near Fort Benson, in which Nick had set forth his plan of floating down the Missouri River in a house-boat built for that purpose, as the guest of the major.

It is doubtful if Chick would have paid much attention to the request in the telegram that he proceed to Montana himself, at once, had it not been for the mention of the outlaw he remembered to have known in his early youth, in Nevada.

Incidents which happen to us in our early youth sometimes make everlasting impressions upon us, and Chick, who had known the man then called "Black Nevada," and suffered considerably at his hands when the first assistant was between twelve and fifteen years old, recalled now, instantly, the implacable character and cruelty of that man's nature. He remembered how inveterately Nevada, now called Arizona, had hated Nick Carter, and as Chick knew the outlaw to be a man who neither forgot nor forgave an injury that was imposed, he realized that if Nick Carter had fallen into the power of the gambler-outlaw, it might, indeed, go hard with him.

It needed but a moment's reflection for him to determine to start for Montana at once, and the consequence was that a message was speedily returned over the wires to Fort Benson which contained the three words:

"I start to-night."

Some hours later Chick received a second message from the West, which read:

"Come via Great Northern Railroad. One of us will meet you at Dodson."

It was signed by Wallace Coburn.

It was very nearly five days after the exchange of these messages when Chick stepped from the passenger-train to the platform of the station at Dodson, Montana, to find two tall, sun-tanned ranchmen awaiting him, and they immediately came forward, each extending a hand, for it so happened that Chick was the only passenger who got off at that place; and the foremost one of them said:

"I reckon, sir, that yuh're the man whom Nick Carter calls 'Chick.'"

"I am," replied the young detective, grasping each one cordially by the hand.

"Well, sir, my name is Jim Thornhill, and this is Bob Coburn. We're both Nick Carter's friends and we're both signers of that telegram you received about him."

"All right," said Chick. "What is the news? Have you anything to tell me about it?"

"No," said Thornhill, speaking for both of them. "We're sure plumb up against it. It's pretty near eight days now since the 'Kid' and his pal got away and probably took Nick Carter with them, and although we have scoured the country for a radius of a hundred miles around Landusky, we have not been able to find a trace as big as a pin's head of any of them."

"Then I don't quite see how I'm to be of very much assistance," said Chick gloomily. "If you men who are accustomed to this country, and particularly to this locality, are at a loss to find the trail of the outlaws, it isn't likely that I'll be much more successful than you."

"We're glad you're here, all the same," said Thornhill. "If yuh'll just come over to Monte's place we'll sit down there and talk it over a few minutes before we decide what to do."

Monte's place was a saloon, of course, and the three men were presently seated in one corner of it, facing one another across the table they had pulled up between them, and Chick began the conversation by saying:

"Now, gentlemen, I'm going to find out what stories you have to tell me by asking questions, for in that way I can get at what I wish to know more quickly, I think."

"That's agreeable," said Thornhill, while Coburn nodded.

"First," said Chick, "I want a little information which goes back of this present affair."

"All right, sir," said Thornhill, who constituted himself spokesman for Bob as well as himself.

"The last information I had of my chief," continued Chick, "was contained in a letter he wrote me concerning

a contemplated trip down the Missouri River in a house-boat. Do you two know anything about that?"

"Why, that's where all the trouble began," said Jim, rolling himself a cigarette.

"Tell me about it."

"Well, there ain't much to tell about, except that Nick met up with the major's outfit while he was at Great Falls, and the major asked him to join the party.

"It consisted of the major and an English friend of his, the major's wife and daughter, Alice, and a niece named Lola Craddock. It seems, Chick, that the major was carrying considerable money with him aboard that house-boat, intending to invest it on the way down the river, and that Kid Curry, who had returned to this part of the country, without any of us knowing about it, got wise to the fact. He had a pal at that time called 'Scar' Benson, and the two of them, with some others to help them, managed to hold up the boat in the river at the mouth of Beauchamp Creek, where they killed one man, pretty nearly killed the Englishman, tied up Mrs. Corson, locked Nick Carter in his stateroom and fooled him into staying there till they got away, and they carried off not only the money, but the two girls as well."

"Go on," said Chick.

"Well, Nick Carter sort of took charge of the chase after the outlaws, and later, when we were following their trail across the western spur of the Little Rockies, we met up with an Indian chief called Gray Feather, who guided Nick Carter by a secret trail to the outlaws' retreat over between Mount Garfield and the Bear Paws."

"Go on," said Chick again.

"There ain't much more to tell about that," continued Jim, "except that Nick brought the 'Kid' out a prisoner and saved the two girls and all the money, after the 'Kid' had murdered his pal, 'Scar' Benson, and broken up, as we supposed, the entire outfit."

"Was it after that that the 'Kid' was tried for murder at the time there was a riot, as you stated in your telegram?" asked Chick.

"Yes, that was the time."

"Tell me about that," said Chick.

"Well, this other pal of the 'Kid's' had come to town; this one who calls himself Arizona, and he'd brought with him a whole outfit cut out of the same kind of cloth that he was. They got up a riot of some kind and 'Kid' got away from the court-house, and when Nick tried to stop him some uh them managed to rap him on the head and they carried him off with 'em."

"So this is the second time he had been in their power?"

"Exactly."

"How did he escape from them that time?"

"Well, that's a pretty long story, Chick. Not to go into particulars much, I'll say that he did get away—that is, he not only escaped from them, but he captured them both, and we brought 'em back to jail, and now it's up to this second escape."

The young detective was silent for a moment, thinking deeply, and then suddenly he raised his head and asked abruptly:

"What has become of that Indian chief, Gray Feather?"

Bob and Jim glanced at each other quickly and grinned, and then Thornhill replied:

"I reckon that we're both a little bit ashamed to admit it, but since this last business came to the front we ain't either of us thought a word about Gray Feather."

"In that case," said Chick, smiling, "I think our first duty at the present moment is to find Gray Feather and get him to help us."

"You are sure right, pardner!" exclaimed Bob Coburn, starting to his feet and enthusiastically thrusting out his hand toward the young detective.

CHAPTER II.

A LOST TRAIL.

After a moment's silence, Chick continued his questioning.

"Now," he said, "I would like you to tell me just what you have done since this last escape of the outlaws."

"We have done about everything we can think of," replied Jim.

"Yes," broke in Bob Coburn, "but all of us have been too plumb locoed to think about Gray Feather, which all goes to prove, Jim, that if we didn't think of that there's been a mighty lot of other things we ain't thought of, likewise."

"Nevertheless," said Chick, "tell me what you have done."

"Well, Chick," continued Thornhill, "we've sent scouting-parties out of Landusky toward every point of the compass. They've circled to the south as far as the Big Mountain; over to the eastward half-way to the Tiger Buttes; to the north as far as where we're sitting now discussing it, and to the westward way 'round Mt. Garfield and back again. We sent out the very best scouts we had, and there ain't a man within a hundred miles of Landusky who doesn't think it's up to him to find Nick Carter if he can; everybody has taken it as a personal matter reflecting upon himself that them outlaws escaped from us, but we haven't picked up a bit of information or any intelligence of any kind that has been of the slightest assistance to us. We don't know whether the 'Kid' went north or south, or east or west. He used to have an old retreat over in the Four Buttes, near Landusky, where he hung out sometimes, and we found that and burned it up, but we also discovered that he hadn't been there."

"Go on," said Chick.

"Well, he had another hiding-place in the Little Rockies, and we found it and destroyed it the same as we did in the Four Buttes.

"Then there was that place on the west slope of Garfield, and we satisfied ourselves that he hadn't been there. We've been to every ranch around these parts and we've questioned every cow-puncher and every ranchman, only to find that there ain't one of them who's seen hide nor hair nor found a trace of the outlaws or Nick Carter. To put the plumb truth straight at you, we're up against it, we are; we're lookin' straight up in the air at this moment without knowing which way to turn."

"And the first sensible suggestion that has been made," said Bob Coburn, bringing his fist down upon the table until the glasses upon it danced and shook, "is the one yuh've just made, Chick, about Gray Feather."

"Are your friends still continuing the search?" asked Chick.

"They sure are."

"How many are out engaged in that search now?"

"Well, I reckon that fifty wouldn't be overestimatin' the number."

"And in what direction are they from there?"

"Mostly in every direction, Chick. I reckon they're all around us."

"Have you arranged any system of signals or messenger service so that they can send messages to you or you can get word to them?"

"Sure thing."

"Where would be the most central point for us to await them, provided you sent out word at once for all of them to come together at some place to talk it over?"

"I reckon that Landusky would be about the place."

"How do you get word to them?"

"Smoke talk," was the laconic reply.

"Smoke talk," laughed Chick, "that's a new one on me; you'll have to explain."

"Well, you see, Chick," said Thornhill, leaning back and crossing one leg over the other, while he thrust his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, "you needn't take no offense, but when all is said, you're just what we call a tenderfoot out here, you know."

"I'm quite willing to admit that, Jim," replied Chick, adopting the familiar tone of intimacy that the others had used, "and I'll be glad if you'll treat me as one, at least till I am thoroughly posted in this matter. Please go on and explain that 'smoke talk' to me."

"Look here, Chick," and Thornhill leaned a little forward and his eyes twinkled, "I hope you ain't guying us because we happen to know—Nick told us all about it—that you begun your career over in Nevada, and mebbe you ain't so much of a tenderfoot as you'd make out to be."

"Possibly that's true," admitted Chick, smiling.

"And mebbe you know as much about 'smoke talk' as we do."

"Nevertheless, I would like to know exactly what you mean by it."

"I mean, that in the good old times when every man around these parts carried his life sort of pinned to his sleeves so it might be brushed off any minute—when the Injuns were mighty uncertain critters and were likely to go on the war-path any minute and when they scalped yuh anyhow if they had half a show of doing so without getting caught—it became a necessity that we knew how to read their signals, which they made with smoke, and in due time we adopted a code of signals of our own made in the same way. That's smoke talk, Chick."

"Do you mean, Jim, that by the use of those smoke signals you can telegraph to your friends to come back to Landusky as quickly as possible and meet us there?"

"That's what I mean, Chick."

"There's a place about six miles from here from which we're to signal after we've talked to yuh, and some of the fellers will sure be watching for it. They'll see it, know what me mean, and pass the word along so that before sundown to-morrow night I'll guarantee that pretty near every man that's out on the trail now will be headin' straight for Landusky."

"Good," said Chick, "and I suggest that you lose no time in sending out that signal. Wait," he added, as Bob Coburn started to his feet; "does it take more than one of you to make that signal?"

"Only one," replied Coburn, "and I was about to start out to attend to that myself."

"Then before you start," continued Chick, "tell me where we would be most likely to find Gray Feather."

"I reckon he'd be somewhere south of here, in the Fort Belknap Reservation; anyhow, it won't be much trouble finding him."

"Then I suggest," said Chick, drumming on the table with the tips of his fingers, "that while you're attending to the matter of the smoke signals, Thornhill and I start out at once in search of the Indian chief, so that we may take him with us to Landusky."

Thornhill nodded.

"That's a good idea," he said. "Yuh go ahead, Bob, and make your signal, and yuh better make it twice, about six hours apart, to make sure. Make one to-night just before sundown and I reckon yuh can get there in time to do that, and another one in the morning at sunrise. How does that strike yuh?"

"It strikes me all right," said Bob.

"While yuh're doing it, Chick and me will start for the reservation; we'll meet up with some young bucks down there and we'll find Gray Feather and take him along with us, and so as yuh can find us, Bob, before we get to

Landusky, we'll go through the pass between the Little Rockies and the Four Buttes."

"Agreed!" said Bob, and he reached across the table and shook hands heartily with Chick as he added:

"We're both right glad yuh've come out here, Chick, and so will all the rest of the fellers be. This mystery about Nick's disappearance has sort uh taken the starch out of us, but now that yuh're here I seem to feel new life, and I've got a hunch that we'll hit the trail of them outlaws before we're two days older."

There was still four hours or more of daylight ahead of them when Chick and Thornhill rode out of Dodson together, bound southward along People's Creek, which crossed the reservation in a northeasterly direction, and shortly after sundown of the same day they entered a small Indian village, toward which Thornhill had led the way.

It was only a cluster of teepees that nestled at the mouth of a coulée, where some of the more energetic of the young Indians had established a summer camp, and here it was their great good fortune to find Gray Feather himself, who had arrived there, strangely enough, less than an hour before them.

Thornhill's first question, when they entered this camp, was addressed to one of the bucks who came forward to meet them, and he said:

"How, Straight Arrow."

"How, White Chief," was the stoical reply.

"Straight Arrow," continued Thornhill, "this is a great friend of mine from far away toward the rising sun, and he comes here to have a talk with Gray Feather, and we wish to find Gray Feather as soon as possible; and if, Straight Arrow, yuh'll help us, White Chief will not forget the favor."

"Great Feather is here," was the laconic reply.

"What! Here in this camp?"

"Gray Feather is here, White Chief; he came only a little while ago. He has traveled far; he was tired and worn and had been wounded and almost starving. The medicine man gave him to drink of the juice of herbs and he now sleeps. In the morning at sunrise he will awaken and then the friend of the white chief can have his talk."

"Wounded and starving!" exclaimed Thornhill. "Do yuh know how it happened, Straight Arrow?"

"No, White Chief; no questions were asked him; tomorrow he will tell his tale."

The young Indian motioned for the white men to follow him, and, turning, led the way among the teepees of the camp and presently throwing aside the flap of one of them, he indicated with hospitality peculiar to his tribe that it was at their disposal while they wished to remain with them.

"Chick," said Thornhill, while they were caring for their horses and making arrangements to wait until morning for their talk with Gray Feather, "I think that when you asked for that Indian chief you hit the bull's-eye with the first shot."

"Why?" asked Chick.

"Because there isn't a white man or an Indian around these parts now who would do harm to Gray Feather, unless it is one of that outlaw outfit."

"I think I understand," said Chick.

"Understand? Of course you understand; it's as plain as the nose on yuhr face. Gray Feather has been devoted to Nick Carter ever since they went to the outlaws' camp together. I haven't a doubt in my mind now that the Indian, having heard of the disappearance of Nick, has hit the trail already by himself, with the determination to find him and rescue him if he could, and that somehow he has met up with one or more of the outlaws, who has left him in the condition that Straight Arrow describes.

"It strikes me, Chick, that when we talk with him in the morning we'll come pretty near finding out what we're hunting, and where to hunt for it."

CHAPTER III.

GRAY FEATHER'S STORY.

Our two friends slept that night in the Indian village, occupying the teepee that had been assigned to them by Straight Arrow.

In the morning they awakened at the break of day and, having breakfasted, word was brought to them that Gray Feather had been informed of their presence and was awaiting them, and presently, under the guidance of Straight Arrow himself, they were taken to a wigwam larger than the others, and there they found, stretched upon a bed of skins, a handsome Indian, who had once already so thoroughly befriended Nick Carter.*

But it was not the Gray Feather whom Thornhill knew, for this man, weakly lying upon his couch of sickness, was haggard to gauntness; weak and emaciated to such an extent that he bore very little resemblance to the handsome young Indian who had guided the detective through the mountains to the outlaws' retreat.

All his old-time spirit was there, however, and flashed in his eyes as he smiled a recognition upon Jim Thornhill and acknowledged with true Indian dignity Chick's introduction to him.

"Gray Father is pleased to see you, White Chief," he said to Thornhill, in a voice that was scarcely his own. "To-day, if you had not come, I should have sent a runner to you, probably Straight Arrow, to acquaint you with the information I have concerning our white brother who is now a captive in the hands of the outlaws."

*See No. 556 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Bad Man of Montana."

"Then you have seen him!" exclaimed Chick.

"I have seen him," replied the Indian calmly.

"And you could guide us to him if you were able to travel?"

"As soon as I am able to do so, I will guide you to him."

"Where is he?" asked Chick.

"Far to the north of here," replied the Indian. "Across the border into the land that does not belong to our White Father at Washington."

"In Canada?" asked Chick.

The Indian nodded his head.

"Is it far, from here, Gray Feather?"

"It is two suns' travel from here and more for a fleet horse," was the reply. "Far to the north there is a body of water that is called the Big Lake, out of which flows the White Mud River. It is to the north of Big Lake, among the mountains there, where the outlaws have taken your friend."

"Tell us about it," said Chick.

The Indian permitted his face to relax into a smile and then he replied:

"It was four suns ago, my white brother, that, in crossing from the reservation to the Bear Paw mountains, I came upon the trail of others who were traveling to the northward. It was so faded and indistinct, and had been so carefully covered and concealed by those who made it, that at any other point than the one at which I found it, even I, Gray Feather, would have passed without discovering it.

"But it happened that I came upon it at one spot where the men who made it had failed to conceal it, and in the imprint that I found I recognized the marks of three footprints as perfectly as if the names of the men who made them had been written there."

"Good!" said Thornhill.

"Please go on," said Chick.

"The white man's moccasin, that he calls 'boots,' has hard heels and each white man wears his heels down in a different way; all that becomes plain to an Indian after he has studied them. In the footprints that I found beside a little spring where the men had led their horses to water, I recognized the trail of the outlaw, Curry; of his friend who is called Arizona, and one of a friend of theirs whom I do not know, although his trail is familiar to me.

"I had been told of the escape of the outlaw chief from his prison, and of the disappearance of my white brother, who was probably a prisoner among them, and so I took the trail and followed it.

"I have said that the trail was almost entirely concealed. It was only here and there that I could find traces of it; nevertheless, I managed to keep it and followed it northward all the rest of that day, and had started again upon it the following morning when I, Gray Feather, acted like a squaw and permitted myself to walk straight into an ambush that had been prepared for me."

"How was that?" asked Chick.

"The outlaw had sent back men along his trail to discover if he was followed, and the three men had seen me approaching them, and concealed themselves and waited for me.

"The result was a shock to Gray Feather, for with all my alertness, before I knew the danger surrounding me, two lariats fell over my shoulders and I was captured.

"I don't know now why they did not kill me, unless it was that to have done so would have been to betray their presence there, and probably to supply another trail that might be followed to the place where they were going.

"They compelled me to mount a horse; my feet were tied together under its belly and I rode with them to the place I have described before—Big Lake."

"And you saw Nick Carter there?" asked Chick.

"I saw him there," continued the Indian slowly, "but I doubt if he is there now."

"What do you mean, Gray Feather?" demanded the young detective.

"I mean that he is probably dead bofore this time, for I know that it had been determined to kill him."

"How did you escape?"

Again the Indian permitted his face to relax into a smile, and after a moment of silence he continued in a low tone:

"It is strange to me how it did happen. I was tightly bound with strips of rawhide around my ankles and wrists, and I was thrown into a brush hut upon the ground beside my white brother from the East."

"Was that the first time you saw him?"

"It was the first actual knowledge I had that he was there."

"Go on, please."

"We talked together as soon as we were able to do so, but all the while a man stood guard over us; there was very little that we could say that would be of interest to you if I repeated it. Nevertheless, he told me that it had been already decided that they were to take his life, but how, he did not know. He said it was the vengeance of the man called Arizona."

Chick ground his teeth and clenched his hands, and then, in a voice which he succeeded in controlling into calmness, he repeated his former question:

"How did you escape, Gray Feather, and why did you not bring Nick Carter with you?"

"I was about to tell you that, my white brother. I was awakened in the night that followed by feeling a hand gliding over me. Before that I had been sleeping, and therefore there could have been no sound, because I waken easily, as all Indians do. The hand glided down to the thongs that bound my wrists and severed them

with a knife; a moment later the bonds upon my ankles were likewise cut and I was about to rise to my feet when the hand that had done me this service pushed me down again, and in my own language a voice whispered in my ear, and it was the voice of a young Indian girl, that I was to remain quiet for a few moments, and then to make my escape as I could.

"I was about to ask her if she had also liberated my white brother, who was beside me, when she glided away silently through the darkness and left me alone.

"Being free now, I reached out with my hand to the place where my white brother had been lying beside me, to discover that it was vacant, although still warm from the pressure of his body there, and I decided at once he had been freed of his bonds and had already made his escape."

"But," exclaimed Chick, "you should have known he would not have done that; he would not have gone away and left you bound and helpless behind him."

Once again the Indian smiled and his eyes glistened as he replied with more animation than he had shown before:

"I know that quite well, white brother; I knew it then; but you must remember how I had been freed and the thought came to me at once that he had first been liberated and taken outside and that somewhere he would be waiting for me; that the young girl who had liberated me would be waiting in the outskirts of the place to guide me to him."

"Go on," said Chick.

"And so, presently, when the time had elapsed that I had been told to wait, I started away, crawling upon my belly as a snake goes, and for a considerable distance I continued in this manner until I believed I was free from pursuit.

"But even as I leaped to my feet to start forward I heard an outcry behind me, and knew that the escape had been discovered.

"I still believed that my white brother had made his escape and, realizing that there was no chance for us to come together then in the darkness, I started away as rapidly as I could.

"I need not describe at length how I finally got here.

"It is sufficient to say that the following morning, soon after sunrise, a bullet from the gun of one of the outlaws knocked me senseless by grazing my head, and I pitched forward into a coulée, where I was badly bruised and where I must have remained a long time unconscious.

"At least, my enemies did not discover me, and when I recovered it was again night.

"There is no more to tell now, save that until the middle of the day, yesterday, those outlaws were hot upon my trail, and I knew that at whatever risk they would shoot me down if they got a chance.

"I was unarmed, and there was no way in which I could procure food. My wound and the bruises I had sustained in my fall into the coulée had made me weak and almost helpless, and so it was with difficulty I succeeded in covering my trail at all. At last, however, I was fortunate enough to capture a fugitive pony that had strayed from his fellows and so I finally arrived here among my people."

He stopped in his recital and then added slowly:

"I don't know who set me at liberty, but it is my belief that the Indian girl who did it arrived too late to be of service to us both; that my white brother had already been taken away from the hut where we were prisoners to meet the fate that had been prepared for him."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER GETS THREE ROUSING CHEERS.

"You can guide us to that place?" asked Chick.

"I can," was the instant reply.

"And you will do so?"

"I will."

"How soon will you be able to travel?"

"At the end of two suns from now I will be ready."

"Tell me what Nick Carter said to you when you were lying side by side, prisoners in the hands of the outlaws."

"He told me that he didn't know how he had fallen into their power. He led me to believe that somehow he had been given a strange medicine that had rendered him unconscious, and that he had known nothing about his surroundings until he found himself where I discovered him."

"Do you mean that he remembered nothing of the journey to that place from Landusky?"

"That is the way I understood it, my white brother."

"What more did he tell you?"

"He told me of the hate that the man Arizona felt toward him. He told me that Arizona had purposely drawn his bonds so tightly as to stop the circulation of his blood and had visited upon him every exquisite torture that he could.

"He told me that Arizona had gloated over him and said that he should never escape alive, and when I said to him that we should find some means of getting away together, he replied to me in these words:

"Arizona will not let me escape if he can help it. He hates me because of a grudge he has had against me for years, and because he believes that he will never have good fortune while I am alive.

"That is practically all that we had a chance to say to each other, and now does my white brother wish me to tell him exactly what I think about it?"

"I certainly do," said Chick.

"I think that my white brother, Nick Carter, may have been befriended by the squaw as I was. I think that if she did not have an opportunity to do it before she set me at liberty, that she may have had a chance to perform a service for him later, and I believe that that is the only way in which he could have escaped the torture."

"The torture!" exclaimed Chick.

"Yes, the torture, my white brother; for while I was a prisoner among those men, I heard them talking together in the Kootenai tongue, which I understand. I know that among their gang of outlaws which they have now organized there are many half-breeds and many bad Indians from different tribes, and I know that these white men have promised those bad Indians and half-breeds to give Nick Carter up to them for torture.

"You may not know it, but the wild blood that flows in an Indian's veins craves for the excitement of the torture-stake if that Indian be a bad one. There is nothing which will inflame their passions as that will, and there is nothing that will make them so wholly the property of the white renegade as for the outlaw to aid them in such practises; and therefore, my white brother, I say to you that if Nick Carter did not escape from the outlaw camp the same night I did, that if the Indian girl who saved me did not also rescue him, he is to-day dead, and has died in torture at the stake, with fire around his feet and with splinters thrust through his flesh."

Chick drew back in horror and turned his eyes appealingly toward Thornhill, who had been a silent listener to Chick's conversation.

"Can you believe that, Jim?" he asked. "Can you believe that they would dare to do such a thing as that?"

Thornhill ground his teeth together and answered slowly:

"I could believe anything of that fellow Arizona. It does seem hard to believe it of 'Kid' Curry. It's true he's a bad man, that he's killed a good many, but he had always been counted a brave man for all that, and a brave white man would never consent to anything such as the Indian has described."

"You forget," said Gray Feather, speaking again, and now addressing Thornhill, "that the outlaw, Curry, has been driven to desperation from every place where he has tried to go. From a white man he became an outlaw; from an outlaw he has become a savage; and a white man who has been made a savage in that way is worse, white chief, than any Indian who ever lived."

"That's sure true," muttered Thornhill.

"The outlaw, Curry," went on Gray Feather, intends now to gather around him a great tribe of followers that will number so many that he can defy even the soldiers of the government. He intends to rob and murder and pillage, and to revenge himself upon the entire community for the wrongs he believes he has suffered. Therefore, I say to you that he will consent to the torture of Nick Carter."

"How many men did you see at that outlaw camp?" asked Chick.

"As many as I might count on my two hands five or six times over."

"Fifty or sixty men," muttered the young detective.

The Indian nodded.

"And there were more to come," he said. "I heard them talking in the Kootenai tongue, as I have told you, and I know from what they said that runners had been sent out in every direction and that it is the intention of the outlaw gang to play back and forth across the border between the United States and Canada to rob whole villages; to hold up trains and to make for themselves a stronghold there in that place north of the Big Lake I have described, where they believe they can defend themselves against as many men as may be brought against them."

Chick arose and stepped forward and stood for a moment over the Indian, looking down at him.

"Gray Feather," he said, adopting the Indian's mode of speech, "you are a great chief."

"My fathers were great chiefs before me," said the Indian stoically.

"You love your white brother, as you call him, Nick Carter, do you not?"

"I love him as if he were indeed my brother."

"And you will do all in your power, I know, Gray Feather, to aid us not only in rescuing him from the hands of these outlaws, but in bringing to justice those who have threatened him with torture?"

"I will aid you," replied the chief slowly and solemnly, "even to the sacrifice of my life."

Chick bent forward and grasped the Indian's hand in his own and then he said:

"I have tried your patience and your strength all the latter will bear, and now I shall leave you to get what rest you can. I will ask you, Gray Feather, to wait here at this little village for Wallace Coburn, Thornhill and myself, and those who will come with us, until we return to take the trail of those renegades."

"I will wait," said the chief.

"And I want you to do your utmost to be well and strong before we return, which will be in two days at least."

Outside the tent, as soon as they were alone, Thornhill turned to Chick and said:

"There is no use, Chick, in your taking the long ride from here to Landusky and back again. By the way, we have to travel to get there; it is a long and a hard ride, and if I'm not mistaken, you've not been in the saddle any too much of late."

"No," said Chick, "I haven't; but all the same I prefer to go to Landusky with you."

Why

"Because I want to meet those men who will form our trailing-party on their own ground and among their own surroundings."

"Bless you, Chick, there ain't three of 'em live within twenty miles of Landusky."

"Also," continued Chick, ignoring the objection, "I would like to look around the scene of all that has taken place. I would like you to show me the room he occupied the night he disappeared, and I would also like to visit the quarters where 'Kid' Curry and Arizona were imprisoned when they made their escape."

"Yuh don't expect to pick up any information there, do you?" asked Jim.

"It is possible that I may do so," returned Chick, smiling. "You know, Jim, my training has accustomed me to observing things closely and minutely, and it is possible that I may pick up some information or discover something that has escaped your notice; at all events, I will go with you."

The long rest had put the horses in excellent condition, and Thornhill, who led the way along the trail to the southeast, crowded the pace as much as he dared to do, with the result that they made splendid time; and, having stopped twice for rest and refreshment, they rode into Landusky together that evening shortly before nine o'clock, and dismounted in front of the saloon and hotel of which Copper Sam was the proprietor.

They noticed, as they dismounted, that there seemed to be an unusual number of people inside the place, and Chick turned to Thornhill and remarked:

"There seems to be something doing here to-night, Jim!"

The big ranchman laughed aloud as he said:

"I think yuh'll find that a great big bunch of our fellers have come in already in answer to the smoke signals. Yuh'll find a lot of 'em here waiting for us."

He called aloud to one of his own men whom he saw across the street, to look after their horses, and with a few words concerning their care he led the way into the saloon, where, as they opened the door, more than a score of men turned and faced them; and foremost among those who did was Bob Coburn himself, who, having sent up the smoke signals from the appointed place, had managed to beat them to Landusky, after all.

The instant they appeared Bob stepped quickly forward and, grasping Chick by the arm, drew him to the center of the room and then, with a wave of his hand, he announced in a loud voice:

"My friends, I want to introduce you to Nick Carter's first assistant. His name is Chick, and he likes to be called Chick. He is just one of our own kind, cut out of the same kind of cloth that Nick Carter is. I haven't known him myself for more than about fifteen minutes' straight talk, but he's the kind we like and he's come out here all the way from New York to go with us on this expedition after the detective. So now I say to you: Three cheers for Chick, three for Nick Carter, and to the devil with 'Kid' Curry and his gang!"

CHAPTER V.

THE DAY OF DOOM FOR KID CURRY.

Chick bowed his acknowledgments to the men who clustered around him and gladly shook hands as they came forward one by one to greet him, exclaiming:

"Hello, Chick, old man! I'm right glad to know yuh!" or "Put 'er there, Chick, old-timer!" or "Chick, you're all right!" etc., in the hearty, generous, wholesome way that only your true Westerner knows how to express.

They succeeded not only in making him perfectly at home among them at once, but also in assuring him that they were friends of Nick Carter to the back-bone, and would follow to the death, if necessary, any effort that might be made toward his rescue.

Chick greeted each one as best he could, but as others were entering the room every few moments, for the smoke signals had done their work and they were coming from every direction, he finally pulled one of the round tables toward him, and with a light spring leaped upon it, and, waving his hand to enjoin silence, he said:

"My friends, I cannot say to each one of you all that I would like to say, for it would take altogether too long, but I've got a few words that I want to speak to you collectively as if to one individual.

"I don't know whether any of you have ever heard anything about me before, but you all——"

"We know all about you, all right!" shouted a big voice from the far end of the room; "but go on, Chick, let 'er out!"

"But you all know Nick Carter, and a great deal about him," continued the young detective. "As far as I am concerned, I want to say this to you about myself: I was born over in Nevada somewhere, although I don't exactly know where. My first recollection of childhood is of being among a lot of cow-punchers, just like you are, over in the Smoky Valley of Nevada, where every man Jack among them treated me just exactly as if I was his own son or his little brother.

"Those men, boys, compounded as one, made up the only father or mother or relative that I ever knew until Nick Carter visited that country and found me; so I haven't any doubt, and never have had it, that a cow-puncher was my father. The earliest life I ever knew was riding the ranges, and I can't remember the time when I couldn't sit on a horse, no matter how badly he bucked or how young I was at the time."

"Yi! Yi! Yi! Yi!" yelled the men in the crowd.

"What I wanted to tell you was this," Chick continued

when the voices had ceased. "I was a youngster out in that country about twelve or thirteen years old when Nick Carter came out there to round up a notorious gang of outlaws that was known as 'Twenty-one,' and that gang was captained by that same renegade who has been here lately and whom you know as Arizona.

"Arizona has got that old grudge against Nick Carter, and there is something more behind it that I never knew about; that Nick never thought it worth while to tell me, I suppose, but for which Arizona hates him bitterly still.

"Just up northwest of here, in the reservation, Jim Thornhill and I found a young Indian chief named Gray Feather, whom you all know, who found the trail that was left by Kid Curry and Arizona when they carried Nick Carter away, who followed it, was finally captured by them and barely escaped with his life to return to us. He had gotten as far back as that Indian village when he gave out entirely, owing to the privations he had endured.

"But the point is, my friends, that Gray Feather can lead us to the stronghold of Kid Curry and his followers.

"And now a word as to that: The Indian learned enough from the conversations he overheard among the outlaws that they have organized a great big gang, with which they intend to defy the authorities of Canada as well as of your own State. It is their purpose to make it as hot for the ranchmen down here as possible, and then to escape across the border into Canada, where they will repeat their offenses while you men are forgetting what they have done, when they will suddenly burst upon you again to duplicate what they have done before.

"Gray Feather assured me that there are already fifty or sixty of these men, and I take it that he means that by the time we have come into the locality to which they have retreated, there will be even more, or between one and two hundred men in the outlaw outfit.

"Now, what I propose to you is this: I would like to have just as many of you as are willing to do so come with me to that stronghold of the outlaws, to which the Indian will guide us, and wipe them out so effectually that outlawry will have lost its flavor forever in the State of Montana. Will you do this?"

The roar that went up from the men who had now gathered around the table where he stood was sufficient answer.

"Then I propose," continued the young detective, "that you appoint one of your own number as the commander of this expedition and let him select his own lieutenants, and I propose, further, that we here and now agree to a discipline as thorough and complete as any that is exercised over the soldiers in the army; and I propose, still further, that we enlist in this expedition to continue with it until the purposes for which it is created have been accomplished, and I think that's about all."

Chick had turned and leaped to the floor again before they could stay him, and he had barely touched the planking before Jim Thornhill had picked him up and put him back upon the table against his smiling protest.

"We'll just proceed with that 'ere election right now!" Thornhill yelled, "and I propose that we give yuh the unanimous vote as captain of this outfit!"

Another wild shout of approval was the answer to this proposition, and then from all parts of the room came the cry of:

"Speech! Speech! Speech!"

"I have made one speech already," responded Chick, tingling with the glow of enthusiasm induced by the occasion. "It is a great honor you do me, putting yourself under my command, and while I accept it and am glad to do so, I want to say to you that I believe there's many a man here who is better able to fill the position than I am.

"But since you have chosen to elect me as your captain for this occasion, I will ask Thornhill and Bob Coburn to act as my lieutenants, and I will ask them to select the others that are necessary for me; and now if Copper Sam has got anything left over there, it's my treat."

Fifteen minutes later, guided by Jim Thornhill, Chick visited the jail where Curry and Arizona had been imprisoned at the time of this last escape; but although he examined thoroughly the rooms in which they had been prisoners, he found that there was absolutely nothing there to interest him.

Next he had himself taken to the room that Nick Carter had occupied, which was over Copper Sam's saloon, and there he made only one discovery which had escaped the attention of the others, but which explained how the detective had been abducted so quietly and without rousing even himself, as explained by Gray Feather.

A bottle which had once contained chloroform, now entirely evaporated, had been kicked into one corner of the room, where it had escaped attention; and in the dust on the floor underneath the bed where Nick had slept there remained plainly the marks made by a man who had concealed himself there on the night of the capture before Nick returned to his room.

Returning again to the saloon, Chick discovered that already there were forty-five men enlisted in his service for this expedition with the prospect that more would show up by morning, and so it proved, for when on the following day, shortly after sunrise, the troop rode out of Landusky toward the pass between Four Buttes and the Little Rockies, they numbered just sixty, all told; sixty as able-bodied men and as good fighters as were ever mustered together under one banner; and he turned to Jim Thornhill, who rode behind him, and said:

"Jim, if I only knew that Nick Carter was alive and uninjured at this moment, it would be the proudest one of my life. I think that no matter how many rough char-

a[illegible]Curry and Arizona have been able to get together, that we'll sweep them away like chaff before a wind."

Thornhill shrugged his shoulders, smiled complacently, turned in his saddle and looked back over the men; then he replied:

"Chick, there ain't a man in that outfit who wouldn't fight three times his weight in wildcats; this is the day of doom for Kid Curry, the outlaw!"

CHAPTER VI.

CHICK FINDS HIMSELF IN TROUBLE.

They found Gray Feather so wonderfully improved that he was almost well when they arrived at the Indian encampment on the reservation.

The prospect to him of a speedy rescue of his white brother had done more than the remedies of the medicine-man, and it was reported to Chick and his friends that soon after their departure Gray Feather had been up and around the camp and had steadily improved ever since.

The young chief had a reputation among the cow-punchers of being a good Indian, for they had always found him truthful and reliable; and so when he took his place at the head of the column as guide and scout for them, the men gave him one rousing cheer, and Chick, watching him, saw the flush of pride and pleasure suffuse his swarthy cheeks.

The ride to the northward after that was done swiftly and almost in silence, save the low-toned conversation among those who rode nearest to each other.

They bore to the northwest across Snake Creek and across Milk River, between Chinook and Yantic, and thence followed the bottom of Battle River, which Gray Feather said was the quickest route to their destination; and such good time did they make that they camped the second night just across the border, in Canada. There were still between forty and fifty miles to travel before they would arrive in the immediate vicinity of the outlaws' stronghold, and Chick regulated the pace so that when sundown of that day overtook them they were within five miles of the supposed destination.

Much of this distance Chick had ridden beside Gray Feather, who described thoroughly to him the country around about the place where they would find the outlaws.

This place, as the Indian described it, was a succession of volcanic rocks thrown together in confused heaps, which resembled the buttes of Montana, only not so high and big, but owing to the rugged character of the country, that sharp rocks and the thick bush which grew all over them, it was almost impassable save where trails had been made or where nature had left one clear.

The Indian had described the narrow pass which led into the very heart of this region, which Chick understood to be many miles in extent, and almost impassable for an attacking-party, for the approaches to it were well guarded. The Indian had made a suggestion which found favor with Chick at once, which was that they should circle around the head of Big Lake and so around the Bad Lands, by which name he called the outlaws' retreat, and thus be enabled to make the attack from the north.

As soon as dawn appeared the following day they were up and moving again, and before noon had completed the circuit they wished to make and were at last drawn up in line together, prepared to receive the last orders from their elected captain.

"My friends," Chick said to them, "I have thought this matter over very carefully since we started out from Landusky; this is no child's play we have undertaken. We are going against men who are as desperate as any who ever lived out of doors, and although they are outlaws and renegades, and horse-thieves and cattle-thieves; although they are men of the very worst character, we must not forget that in one sense they are also bold men and they will fight.

"There are some of us here who may never return to Landusky, and so I want to thank you all now for what you have done and for what you will do.

"We are sixty men and five lieutenants, and I want you to divide yourselves up in parties and be ready against the time when I shall return."

"What's that?" called out Wallace Coburn from the middle of the men. "What's that about returning? Where are yuh going?"

"I am going," said Chick quietly, "on a scout with Gray Feather."

"What for? What are yuh going to do that for?"

"We are going to locate the outlaws if possible. We are going to pick out the best means of approaching their stronghold after we have located it. We are going to learn just how they are situated and just what kind of a fight they will be able to put up in order that, when we make the attack in full force, we can surround them so thoroughly that not one of them will get away from us."

Wallace Coburn leaped from his horse to the ground and strode forward to the middle of the space between him and the place where Chick was standing.

"I want to know," he said, "what yuh want to do that for? Why don't you pick out one of the men who's

used to scouting? One of the men who's been up to this sort of thing before?"

"Because," said Chick quietly, "I have chosen to select the duty for myself."

"But we don't want our commander-in-chief running into any fool danger like that; don't forget that you're a tenderfoot——"

Chick held up his right hand and Wallace Coburn stopped without completing his sentence, and Chick asked smilingly:

"Is this mutiny, Wallace?"

"Oh, come now, Chick; you know I didn't mean that. I ain't the man for that sort of trick, and yuh know it. Why don't you send me or Bob or Bill or Jim Thornhill or Alick Black or Young Pike Landusky or Miller over there; he's a good scout, or any 'tarnation one of us except yourself; you ain't the man to do that."

"Wallace, didn't you agree to obey orders?" asked Chick quietly.

"I sure did."

"Are you going to do what you agreed to do?"

"I sure am."

"Without any more growling or kicking?"

"Without a growl or a kick if you say so."

"Then obey them, Wallace. The orders are that while I am gone with the Indian you men are to form yourselves into detachments to serve under the lieutenants that have been appointed, of which you are one. I want you to form the detachments up as evenly as possible. I want you to be ready when I return with Gray Feather to hold a consultation with me, in which I want every man present to join, so that we can decide upon the best move to make."

Wallace stepped back to his horse and leaned against the saddle, peering from face to face among the men, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he drawled in a voice that was heard by every man there:

"Well, boys, I guess he's captain, all right!"

Gray Feather had stood silently beside Chick during this colloquy and now, without a word, he dropped his bridle-rein to the ground, leaving his horse to be cared for by one of the men, and strode away toward the chaos of rock and bush that confronted them, and with a wave of his hand toward the others so that a moment later they were lost to view from the men.

For two hours after that Chick followed the Indian in utter silence, neither of them venturing to utter a word, for Chick knew perfectly well that Gray Feather would speak when there was a reason for doing so.

At the end of two hours they came out upon a glade where there was a bubbling spring, the beginning of a brook which later developed into a creek, and finally, without a doubt, found its way to the Milk River, thence to the Missouri, and so onward to the gulf; and as Chick filled a leather cup with cool water from the spring, he wondered as he swallowed it if it would ever have found its way to the salt water if he had not done so.

The long walk after three days of constant riding that he had undergone had tired him greatly, and saying to Gray Feather that he would like to rest there for half an hour, he filled his pipe, lighted it, and stretched out upon a mossy bank that was near at hand.

He was smoking and thinking, trying to imagine what might have happened to Nick, and hoping now almost against hope that nothing had, when he became suddenly conscious that he was alone, and straightening up for a moment, he discovered that the Indian had disappeared.

It was then perhaps three o'clock in the afternoon and, believing that the Indian would soon return and that he had only gone to do a little scouting on his own responsibility, Chick knocked the ashes from his pipe and, rolling over on the moss, rested his head upon his curved arm and permitted the drowsiness he was feeling to overcome him.

The next realizing sense of things around him that the young detective had was one that amounted almost to a nightmare, for there was a suffocating feeling of a great weight upon him.

Instantly he was roused from a half-stupor to full consciousness, and it was to discover that something had been thrown over him, and that, when he attempted to leap to his feet, he was tossed roughly back again, turned over and pinioned to the ground where he was.

He struggled manfully, and in strength Chick is almost the equal of Nick Carter, but the something that had been thrown over him was a blanket, and now there seemed to be dozens of rough hands tumbling him about and he felt himself being rolled over and over in the blanket, while with each roll a new twist of rope was wound about him.

All this time there was not a word spoken by those who had attacked him, although Chick himself had shouted out many times, demanding to know who they were, but presently while he still struggled he received a sharp

blow on the side of his head which half-dazed him, and a gruff voice exclaimed in his ear:

"If you don't stop that racket, I'll stick a knife inter you!"

Then, feeling himself utterly incapable of offering any further resistance, he was conscious that men grasped the blanket in which he had been rolled, lifted him from the ground, and he was borne rapidly away through the bush and over the rocks swiftly and still in utter silence so far as talking was concerned.

Just once the thought came to him that perhaps Gray Feather had proved himself a traitor, but he dismissed it the instant it occurred, realizing that he must have been discovered during his sleep by one of the outlaws accidently running upon him.

His only hope now was that Gray Feather had not also been captured and that he alone might accomplish what they had set out to do together, and that the attack upon the outlaw stronghold would still be made, although under another leadership than his own.

CHAPTER VII.

CHICK'S MOMENT OF FURY.

Wrapped in the blanket as he was, the young detective could form no idea of the distance he was carried, although he knew the way to be exceedingly rough, and that they alternately ascended and descended steep places, now brushing against rocks that stretched part way across the road, and anon forcing their way through dense bushes that partly blocked the pathway.

And presently he felt that he was tied in some sort of a swing and hoisted rapidly into the air, for he had the dizzy sensation of whirling round and round, as a heavy package is apt to do when suspended at the end of a rope.

But he was swung inward at last, and dropped none too gently upon solid rock, when, after a delay when he judged that others ascended after him, he was again picked up and carried this time a short distance across a perfectly level space, through the doorway of some sort of a building, and deposited roughly upon the floor.

He felt a loosening of the cords around the blanket that held him, when they were severed by a knife, then he heard the sound of retreating footsteps, followed by the clanging of a heavy door, and he knew, or, rather, imagined, himself to be alone.

For a moment he remained thus in silence, waiting motionless and listening, but presently, when he heard no sound whatever, he began to struggle to free himself from the clinging blanket.

When at last he threw it from him and stood upon his feet, he was in total darkness, and he began at once to investigate as best he could under the circumstances the interior of the room in which he had been thrust.

The sides of it were rough and jagged, and as if it were formed by the foundation of a house; the floor he discovered to be of stone, and he wondered if he were in the cellar of some building that had been built there among those mountains.

The room itself was perhaps ten feet square, certainly not more than that, and nowhere, save at the point where his hands discovered the heavy oaken door, was there any outlet to it.

That he had fallen into the hands of Kid Curry and Arizona he had no doubt whatever; but why they should have deemed it worth while to capture him and carry him off as they had done was a mystery.

It was perhaps an hour after he had been introduced to his prison cell when he heard the sound of a bar being removed from the opposite side of the door, and presently the cold and expressionless face of Arizona appeared in the opening.

The man stepped quickly inside the door, and deposited a candle he was carrying upon a section of a tree which had been put in the room to serve for a seat.

In his other hand he held a revolver, with the muzzle depressed somewhat, yet in a position so it might be quickly used against the young detective in case he should make any attack upon his jailer, and so they stood facing each other, with the candle between them.

Chick was surprised that he should, after all these years, have instantly recognized the face of the man before him; he did so with something akin to a shudder, for in those days of his boyhood in Nevada this cold-blooded villain who now stood facing him had been Chick's special aversion and horror.

There was a grimace upon the face of Arizona which did duty as a smile, for his thin lips were drawn back a little from his teeth, adding thus to the cruelty of his face, as made more manifest by the extraordinary width between his deep-set eyes.

"So," he said, with a sneer, "you are the grown-up boy I once knew in Nevada, are you?"

"Yes," said Chick, "I suppose I am."

"And you have come all the way out here from New York City to rescue Nick Carter, in response to a telegram sent to you by those fools at Landusky?"

Chick made no reply to this; he did not consider one necessary.

"I suppose, if the truth were known," continued the outlaw, "you're feeling a little bit sorry you came, ain't you?"

"Not in the least," retorted Chick.

"What do you expect to accomplish by it?"

"Two things," was the taciturn reply.

"Two, eh? I thought you came but for one."

"No. I had two purposes in coming to Montana."

"Well, what was the other one? One was to rescue Nick Carter, I suppose; what was the other?"

"The telegram I received mentioned the name of a man I once knew and hated, and it also informed me that that man was one of the two who had my chief in his power. I'll leave the rest to your imagination, Arizona, as you prefer now to be called."

"Oh!" said the outlaw, with a sneer. "So you came here lookin' for me, did you?"

"I certainly did."

"Well, you found me; are you as pleased as you expected to be?"

"I am not particularly pleased, but I will be before I return to New York."

The outlaw laughed aloud. That is, he indulged in an expression which represented a laugh, but which carried with it, in this case, something very much like a threat.

"Return to New York, eh?" he said, toying with the pistol he held in his hand. "I think you ought to realize that New York will never see you again, young man. You have traveled your last mile in this world. I hated your father, and——"

"My father!" exclaimed Chick, surprised, off his guard, and out of his coolness for the moment, for his father was a subject that he had never mentioned in all these years, save in one long-ago conversation with Nick Carter, and in that short speech he had made to the men in Copper Sam's saloon.

But, nevertheless, it was a subject very close to him, and one which he often wondered about; one which on two occasions he had tried to solve, but which he had been unable to do.

"My father?" he repeated. "Do you mean to tell me that you knew my father?"

"Sure I knew him, and hated him, and I hate you because of him."

He still toyed with the revolver, with his basilisklike eyes fixed upon the face of the young detective, who still confronted him.

It was evident that he was turning something over in his mind, undetermined whether to utter the thought that came to him or not; and Chick was also lost in thought for a moment, for the suggestion made to him that this outlaw had known his father, and could tell him about him if he would, had filled Chick with a strange desire to question Arizona, although he knew in his heart that he could not rely upon anything that the man might tell him. Even now he might be lying when he claimed to have known Chick's father.

But before he could make up his mind whether to ask the questions that came to his mind or not, Arizona spoke again, in that cold and sneering tone of his which was almost an insult of itself.

"You don't even know who your father was, do you?" he sneered.

"No," replied Chick, "I do not."

"Nor whether he's dead or alive, eh?"

"No. Although I have always supposed him to be dead."

"And you don't know how he died, or where he died, even if he is dead, do you?"

"No," replied Chick, still in the same even tone. "I have no knowledge whatever concerning him."

"But you'd like to know something about him, wouldn't you?"

"I would."

"And I suppose you'd like to have me tell you, wouldn't you?"

"I'm not sure whether I would or not, Arizona, for no matter what you might say, I would find it difficult to believe you."

"Oh, you can believe what I tell you, all right, when it's about your father!"

"Tell me, then, what his name was," said Chick; "I have never known."

The outlaw laughed harshly.

"No," he said, "I won't tell you that."

"You insinuated just now that he might still be living. Is it true that he is still alive?"

"No; he's dead."

"Where did he die? Where is his body?"

This time it was something that closely resembled a chuckle that Arizona uttered, and after it he shrugged his shoulders, as he replied:

"He died mighty sudden, Chick, when he did die, and it was in Nevada, not very far from where Nick Carter found you."

"He died suddenly?" said Chick softly, his eyes narrowing and his muscles taking upon themselves a fierce tension, such as a panther is supposed to feel just before it springs upon its prey. "Do you mean that he was killed?"

"Shot through the heart."

"And you will not tell me his name?"

"No, I won't tell you his name; there's no need of it."

"Will you tell me the name of the man who shot him?"

"Mebbe so; I'm thinkin' about that now."

"Was he killed in a fair fight? Did he have a chance for his life?"

"Oh, say! you're getting altogether too particular with your questions."

Chick took one step nearer to the candle which was between him and the outlaw, but he stopped, for Arizona raised the muzzle of his weapon just a little, as if to warn him to come no closer, although he gave no further evidence that he noticed the movement.

"Will you tell me the name of the man who shot my father?" again speaking coolly and quite impersonally, as if the question had no direct interest for him.

"If I should, what then?" Arizona sneered across the candlelight at him.

"What then?" Chick smiled, without being conscious that he did so. "What then? I'll seek the man and find him."

Once more the outlaw laughed harshly, and then, with cold cruelty in tone and manner, he said:

"You've found him already, you young fool!"

Chick did not move.

He was trying to grasp the idea that this man before him, this outlaw, whom he despised and hated; this creature who stood facing him across the candlelight, with the weapon ready for use, was confessing to him that it was he himself, he, Arizona, who had murdered Chick's father.

In that moment he forgot the position they were in; the fact that he was a prisoner in that room escaped him; he did not even remember the menacing pistol in the hand of the other man, for he was gradually seeing before him the murderer of his father; and when he spoke it was so slowly that there was almost a pause between each word that he uttered. He said:

"Arizona, are you trying to tell me that it was you that shot and killed my father?"

"That's what!"

The instant the two words were uttered, even before they were entirely pronounced, Chick leaped forward as if propelled by some sudden and unseen impulse from behind. The candle was dashed to the floor and extinguished; the pistol in Arizona's hand was discharged with a fearful roar in those narrow quarters, and so close to Chick's face that the blaze of it blinded him and the powder from it burned his skin.

But somehow he got past the bullet, and seized the man who had spoken those terrible words in a grasp which in his fury had become gigantic in its strength.

Arizona, feeling that grip upon him, managed to utter the beginning of a cry for help before his utterance was shut off by the choking fingers at his throat; and Chick lifted him from the floor and hurled him as if he had been a half-grown child bodily across the room, that was now utterly dark, so that he crashed against the rough stone walls already described, and then fell to the floor like a dead thing.

If there had been light in the room, Chick would undoubtedly have followed him up, to complete the vengeance that was only just begun; but with the exertion of casting his enemy from him as he had done came the reaction, that brought back to his mind the purpose that had drawn him to that house, and he realized instantly that not only his own life, but Nick Carter's, as well, depended upon his coolness at that moment.

For the moment, while he acted under the surprise of the information he had received, he was like a man beside himself, but the exertion that had followed upon it was like a safety-valve, bringing him to himself instantly; and so, instead of continuing his attack upon Arizona, he stooped and felt around on the floor for the candle that had fallen from the stump.

By good fortune, his hand rested upon it instantly, and, seizing it in his grasp, he stepped quickly in the direction of the door as he remembered it, found it, passed through and closed it after him; searched for and

in the darkness found the bar that held it in place, and so locked Arizona securely in the room where but a few moments before he had himself been imprisoned.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET OF ROBBERS' ROOST.

Mindful of the fact that a pistol-shot had just sounded from that room he was leaving, and conscious only of the terrible noise it made in the narrow confines of the place, it seemed impossible to Chick that the report had not been heard all over the building, if, indeed, building it was; and the moment he succeeded in fixing the bar in place, he stood perfectly still, and listened for the sound of approaching footsteps, or for any indication that an alarm had been given.

Utter silence greeted him, however, and after listening thus for a moment, and being satisfied that he was in no immediate danger of discovery, he remembered with some surprise that he was still in total darkness. If it was a corridor, not a ray more of light penetrated there than in the room he had just left.

He knew that in the open air it should still be daylight, for it was only about four o'clock in the afternoon when he was overpowered and captured, and the time that had elapsed since then could not have exceeded two hours.

Then he was conscious of the candle he still held in his hand, and he also discovered, to his intense surprise, a thing that had escaped his notice until now, which was that he had not been relieved of the weapons he carried in his belt.

He smiled a little at this, recalling, as an explanation of the incident, how his capture had been effected; how the men who took him had fallen upon him, enveloping him in the blanket, winding him in it and so carrying him bodily away.

They had given themselves no opportunity to take his weapons from him, and in the haste of leaving him in the room where he had been confined had doubtless forgotten them.

It was a question in his mind for a moment whether it would be policy or not to light the candle; but confessing that it was impossible for him to find his way about at all without the aid of some sort of light, he took the chances, and ignited a match by rubbing it against his clothing.

As soon as the candle was lighted, he held it aloft over his head, and discovered that he was indeed in some sort of a corridor, but a closer inspection quickly developed the fact that it was an excavation, rather than a building, which environed him.

The circle of light cast by the candle was not sufficient for him to see any considerable distance, but from what little he could observe he saw that the corridor or passage inclined upward in one direction and downward in the other.

It would naturally be supposed that the way to freedom would lead upward, since he was undoubtedly in a cavern or excavation, but at that moment he was thinking more of the probability that Nick Carter was confined somewhere in that place than of his own immediate escape.

The time during which he hesitated, although it seemed long to him, could not have exceeded a minute; and then setting his teeth together in grim determination, he turned down the corridor, instead of up it, and made his way rapidly along by candlelight, shading the tiny flame as best he could with one hand, and thus preventing any chance draft from extinguishing it.

He had proceeded in this manner for perhaps a hundred yards, when the cavernous passage seemed to come to an abrupt end.

Immediately before him, barring the way to his farther progress, was a huge, round boulder, which looked exactly as if it had been rolled into the place and lodged there.

But as he stepped nearer and examined it more closely, he saw that it just missed coming in contact with the walls of the corridor on either side, and that these walls had been carefully smoothed in the vicinity of the boulder; there was, in fact, a space on either side, between the boulder and the walls, of almost half an inch.

How the rock could ever have been brought there and fixed in place as it was seemed a mystery, until, upon still closer examination of it, he discovered, to his amazement, that it was not a rock at all, but was a manufactured boulder, made of cement.

Studying it still more carefully, he was convinced that the corridor extended beyond it, and that the manufactured barrier had been placed there only as a door to guard against enemies venturing farther into the interior of the cavern.

"If the thing was manufactured by hands," he mut-

tered, "it must have been made right where it is, for it never could have been brought here after it was created; and if it was made where it is by the hands of men, it was also made to move aside, in order that it might be used as a doorway."

Again he studied the walls at either side of it, but apparently there was no way of passing beyond this great barrier, which so resembled a rock that it was next to impossible to determine the difference between it and the real article.

After thinking deeply for a moment on the problem, he extinguished the candle, snuffed the wick with his fingers, and dropped the candle into one of his pockets; then he stepped forward, and, after moistening his hands a bit, so they would cling to the cement rock, he pressed against it with all the weight and strength he could use.

To his surprise and joy, it moved almost instantly beneath his grasp, and so easily and quickly that Chick almost fell forward upon his face.

But he recovered and drew back in time to escape falling, and then stood and waited, conscious, as he did so, of a rush of cooler air against his face from somewhere beyond the movable rock.

The darkness was so intensely black, however, that he could distinguish absolutely nothing, and again he resorted to a match and the candle.

When he had struck the light and held it up so that he could see what was before him, he found that the supposed rock was only the half of a sphere, after all. It was exactly as if an apple or a baseball were cut in half and placed in a corridor that just fitted it, and he had approached it from the side which showed round.

The reader will perfectly understand that if such an arrangement were fixed upon a pivot passing through its center from roof to floor, that when pushed so it would swing around it would leave one-half of the width of the corridor in which it was placed free for an open passageway.

The young detective had not advanced far beyond this strange doorway in the cavernous passage when he was conscious of the murmur of voices from some place beyond, and he paused instantly to listen, at the same time extinguishing his light again.

He went forward very slowly after that, in utter darkness, but presently he became aware that he was approaching a glow of light, which became more brilliant as he advanced, till he saw that it shone into the corridor through an opening at the end that he was rapidly approaching.

And now fearing discovery, and realizing how fatal it would be to him if his presence was suspected there, he dropped first upon his hands and knees, and then, with his body flat upon the rocky floor of the passageway, he wormed himself along inch by inch toward the opening through which he could see the glimmer of light.

He discovered also that it was daylight he saw and not artificial light.

As he drew nearer the opening, the sound of voices became more distinct, and he realized presently that there were many men quite near to him who were gathered at some place into which the cavern opened.

The passageway became smaller as he advanced, and at last he came to the mouth of it, and looked out upon a scene that was both strange and remarkable.

The place was really a valley in these hills, surrounded by precipitous sides none of which were very high, but all of which were of such a character as to be practically unsurmountable.

The valley itself was several acres in extent, and was rough and wild in the extreme, save for the fact that there were many small buildings, some of logs and some of bark, scattered about it, and over at the far side from where Chick stood was a cluster of Indian teepees close against the cliff.

And here he saw, he judged, at least a hundred men, or evidence of the presence of that many. Some of them were engaged in building other huts and teepees; some were preparing their evening meals at fires; other groups were playing cards, and altogether the place presented the typical idea of a regular robber-roost.

Studying the surrounding cliffs from his point of vantage, Chick realized how securely these outlaws were hidden away in the mountain fastness they had selected, and how impossible it would be to dislodge them, save by strategy.

He had no doubt now that at least one of the ways out of that place to the open country beyond was through the passage by which he had approached it; but he could not believe that it was the only means of entry and egress to this robbers' roost. Still, he argued to himself, it would be sufficient for his purpose if he could escape from it without being seen, and, finding his way back to his own men, could lead them without delay to the attack.

He searched eagerly with his eyes up and down and across the valley before him for the face and figure of Nick Carter, but he saw nothing of him, and with a sigh he realized that his duty was to return at once through the passageway, and to find his way back again as quickly as possible to his own men, in order that he might lead them to the attack.

Having decided, he turned about and strode rapidly back through the darkness, waiting until he had almost penetrated to the rocky barrier he had so successfully passed before he attempted to relight his candle. Having done that, he hurried on, closing the circular door after him, and leaving it as he had found it originally.

Then on again, hastening so rapidly that he was almost running, until he was brought suddenly to his senses by the stunning report of a firearm, followed instantly by the impact of a bullet against the rock directly over his head.

It was the work of an instant then to extinguish his candle and to drop flat upon his face in the middle of the corridor, and there he remained, as silent and as motionless as if he had really been shot down.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed in this manner, without a sound coming to him, although he kept one ear pressed tightly against the rock against which he was lying, and then, just as he was about to move forward himself, his patience exhausted, he heard the soft tread of a moccasined foot against the rock some distance ahead of him. He knew then that the man who had fired the bullet at him had waited with almost the same patience he had used, but at last had doubtless come to the conclusion that his bullet had hit the mark, and the man he had shot at was unconscious or dead.

And so Chick remained perfectly still, holding his ear tightly against the rock and listening to the stealthy tread of those approaching footsteps, until he knew that they were almost upon him.

And then, with exceeding caution, he raised himself just a little, so that he could use his arms and hands effectively, and the next instant, feeling the presence of another human being against him, he seized that individual around the legs, tripped him and threw him, and then, with his fingers at the unknown man's throat and his knee upon his breast, began the operation of choking him into insensibility.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRISONER'S GUARD.

The man was sinewy in the extreme, and he fought like a tiger; but Chick had the advantage from the start, and, with his fingers clutched tightly around the fellow's throat, the form presently became limp in his grasp, so that he could reach for one of his weapons, and with this he struck his semiconscious captive a forcible blow upon the head, thus rendering him entirely at his mercy.

And now Chick gathered himself into a sitting-posture, and realizing that he must do one of two things at once; that is, he must either leave his late opponent where he had struck him senseless with the butt of the pistol, and make his escape from the cavern without further delay, or he must take the chances of striking a light, for the purpose of determining who the man was.

He reasoned quickly that the men he had seen in the valley in the interior of the mountain were far away, and probably comprised the entire force of the outlaws; and so, literally taking his life in his hands by the act, he struck a match and relighted the candle.

He waited a moment for it to burn up brightly, and then he held it forward, close to the man's face.

What he saw was a man of less than medium size, with a smooth, sharp-featured face, cruel lips, straight brows, and eyes set widely apart. There was a peculiar pallor on the face which showed even through the tan of mountain winds and sun, and Chick knew instinctively, although he had never seen the man or heard him described particularly, that Kid Curry, the outlaw chief, had fallen into his hands.

Of course, he was not certain of this, he only thought so; but the belief was so strong upon him that he acted upon it, and, with another careful scrutiny of the man, to see if he was still unconscious, he leaped to his feet, seized the body, and threw it across his shoulders, so that Curry's legs hung down on one side of him and the arms on the other, and then he started away along the cavernous corridor as rapidly as he could move with his burden.

He managed still to carry the burning candle in his hand, and he saw and recognized the door of the prison-room where he had lately been confined as he passed it. The bar was still in place across it, and Chick judged that Kid Curry had not discovered that his partner in crime was a prisoner inside that room, instead of the young detective from the East.

Had he really known it, the Kid had not yet been made aware of Chick's capture. He knew nothing that had occurred in or about his camp since the preceding evening, because at that time he had disappeared on an errand of his own, and had only just returned when he encountered Chick in the passageway.

Five minutes later, during which he walked rapidly with his burden, Chick stepped out of the tunnel through the mountain into the open air, to discover that night had fallen, but that the stars were out, aided by a young moon, which gave light sufficient for his needs.

He came out upon a rise of ground which was almost like a ledge, that was surrounded by a fringe of bushes, intended, doubtless, to conceal the secret entrance to the outlaws' retreat; but he did not pause there, fearing lest each moment might bring discovery upon him.

There was a well-worn path through the fringe of bushes, and he followed it rapidly until he had descended to the level below it, and had crossed a shallow, saucer-like depression to a ravine between the small hills of which this strange formation was fashioned.

Here he put down his burden to rest, and also to make sure that consciousness was not returning to his captive, for during the last two or three moments he had imagined he would soon have another struggle on his hands, unless he found means of binding Curry somehow, or resort to the extremity of giving him another rap on the head.

It must be remembered that Chick had no idea of his location relative to the point where he had left Thornhill, the Coburn brothers, and the others of his party.

Coming out of the cavernous place as he did, it was impossible for him to determine whether he should travel north, east, south, or west from there; the points of the compass were easily defined, because the stars were visible, but from which direction he had approached the cavern when he was taken into it he did not know.

He had just begun to devise methods of manufacturing bonds for his captive from the green shoots of the bushes around him, when he was startled by the sudden appearance, directly in front of him, of Gray Feather. He seemed almost to arise out of the earth, to have materialized out of nothing, standing like a statue, with folded arms, before the astonished Chick.

"Gray Feather!" exclaimed the young detective. "I was never more glad to see any one in my life."

The Indian nodded stoically, and pointed with his finger at the prostrate man on the ground between them.

"Does my white brother know who he has captured?" he asked.

"No," replied Chick, "I have only guessed. I thought, from partial descriptions I have heard, that he is Kid Curry."

The Indian nodded assent.

"It is the outlaw chief," he said, "that my white brother has captured. Bad man. We will take him to the others."

He produced leather thongs from a pouch that he carried at his belt, and Kid Curry was presently bound so securely that there could be no hope of his escaping unaided; and then, disdaining the assistance of the young detective, the Indian took the prisoner from the ground, and, throwing him over his back as he would have carried the carcass of a deer, he strode away through the ravine, after calling to Chick the single word:

"Come."

There were questions that Chick would have liked to have asked of the Indian had the latter not started away so suddenly, and when they had covered something like half a mile, he stepped forward, overtook him, and said:

"Wait, Gray Feather. Rest here a moment; there are questions I wish to ask you."

The young Indian chief put down his burden and turned, without the least sign of fatigue because of his exertion.

"I obey my white brother," he said.

"Where were you when I was captured, Gray Feather?"

"I was seeking for the secret retreat of the outlaws."

"When did you know that I had been captured?"

"Only a little bit ago. I had just returned. I had been beyond the hills, to the other side. I had crossed back again, and had found one of the secret trails, which I followed to a depression in the hills, where I saw their camp. There are many of them, my white brother; they have a valley among the hills like the one to which I took Nick Carter once, only it is not so deep, although it is larger."

"You say you found a trail there?" asked Chick.

"Gray Feather found a trail; yes."

"Is it through a cavern? Through a tunnel?"

"No; it is over rocks and through ravines. It comes into the place from the other side from where we stand now."

"Good," said Chick; "then there are two ways of entering the place; and have you only just returned?"

"I just went back to the place where I left you sleeping, to find that men had been there and that you had been captured. I was following their trail, seeking you, when I heard your approach. I waited, believing that the outlaws were returning. Then I saw you, recognized you, and understood."

"Then," said Chick, "you have had no chance to get back to our camp. Come, then, we will go ahead, for Thornhill and the others will be anxious."

The journey was at once resumed, but when Chick offered to bear his part of the burden, or, at least, to carry it part of the way, the Indian would have none of it, and again threw the outlaw chief across his shoulders, as if it were the carcass of some game he had killed, and as this time the ground was more even and the going better, he started away at the heel-and-toe trot so indicative of an Indian, and which takes them over the ground with amazing speed.

When the two entered the camp, an hour later, with their captive, they were greeted warmly indeed, and when it was discovered that Chick had brought back Kid Curry with him, it was with difficulty that the men were restrained from hanging him to a tree then and there. There had been more indignation than anxiety among the men Chick had left behind him, because of his non-return, for none of them liked the idea of waiting in idleness in the vicinity, when so much was to be gained by immediate action, and when every moment of delay must afford the outlaws additional opportunity to learn of the pursuit and to prepare to meet it.

Chick described to his lieutenants and to the others who gathered around them how he had been captured and carried into the cavern, and finally left inside the windowless room that evidently had been hollowed out of the hill itself; and when he explained how he had finally attacked and overcome Arizona in that same room, and left him there, locking him in, a faint cheer went up from the men who heard it.

When he had completed the story by telling of his trip through the tunnel to the robbers' roost, his return and the capture of Kid Curry on the way, and his final encounter with the Indian, who had guided him back to the camp, which he admitted he might not have been able to find alone, Thornhill arose solemnly in the midst of the circle that was gathered around them, and announced:

"I move, my friends, that we hold a council of war right here and now."

"Hear! Hear!" called out somebody in the crowd around them. "What's the good of waitin', anyhow?"

"I move," continued Thornhill, scowling in the direction of the man who had interrupted him, "that we submit to the captain this proposition, for we must not forget that we've elected him our captain, and nothing goes unless he says so."

"That's the stuff!" called the same voice.

"And I'll make a second motion presently," said Thornhill grimly, glancing toward the man who had spoken, "that before we proceed any further that we string up that cow-puncher that's interruptin' these proceedings!"

There was no answer to this, unless a general chuckle around the group could be said to be one, and Thornhill proceeded:

"I move that the captain select five or six of us, of which I'd very much like to be one, and that we start out immediately, ahead of the rest of yuh, for that 'ere cavernous passage that he has described, where he met up with the Kid and brought him into camp. You see, it's this way: Just inside of that there place there's a room in which Chick here was a prisoner not so very long ago, and in which at the present moment there's another prisoner, who happens to be one of the chiefs of the outlaw outfit. Now, we've got one chief, the Kid, right here where he can't get away, and if we get the other chief, and fix him so he'll be a useless article in the scrap that's going to come, it appears to me as if we could put that bunch of thieves on the run good and plenty. So now, if Chick will pick out a few of us, and we can go ahead and fetch out Arizona while the rest of yuh are getting around to yuhr places, I suggest that we move to-night, and take up our position so's we'll be ready to strike the minute that daylight shows itself, and so there won't be any chance whatever for them gazaboes to skiddoo in the meantime. Now, boys, what do you say? Yuh can all talk now."

They did all talk, all at once, but there was no mistaking that their utterances were enthusiastic agreements to the plan proposed.

"You have not finished yet," suggested Chick, smiling. "What do you suggest for the rest of the men?"

"Well, Chick, if you want me to suggest any more, it's

this: That you appoint Wallie Coburn leader of half of this party, and let Gray Feather lead 'em around that there entrance he's described, and then just leave the rest to Wallie; he'll do it."

"I think, Wallace," said Chick, "you can consider that appointment made, and you can start as soon as you've told off your men and are ready. Now, Jim, what else?"

"Why, nothin' else, only the rest of the fellers better follow our bunch, that's goin' after Arizona; I just want 'em to keep far enough in the rear so's they won't interfere none with what we're doin', and, oh, yes, there's one thing else I've forgot!"

"What's that?" asked Chick.

"Why, it's kind uh funny, but I was plumb forgettin' all about Kid Curry here. You see, we can't very well leave him behind us, and we can't very well leave him without a guard; not unless we tie him up to a tree."

"He might escape even then, Jim."

"He sure wouldn't escape, Chick, if I tied him up; his feet wouldn't touch the ground."

There was a general laugh, not very promising for Kid Curry, that went the round of the group at this, but Chick interrupted it by saying:

"I won't consent to anything of that sort, Jim; we'll tie him to a tree, as you suggest, but with his feet on the ground, and I'll leave two or three men here to guard him till we return, with instructions to shoot him if any attempt is made to rescue him, or he tries to escape."

"I guess that'll do, if you can find any of the boys who are willing to stay and guard him; I'm hanged if I would, even if you ordered me to."

Chick looked around him for a moment at the grim faces, and he asked:

"Will two or three of you volunteer to stand guard over Kid Curry while the rest of us make the attack on the outlaw den?"

There was no answer, and Chick shut his lips tightly together for a moment, then he spoke again:

"You have elected me your captain; I shall begin yonder at that end, and count one, two, three, four, five, and each time I say 'five,' the man I point at when I say it will remain behind to act as one of the guards. Such are my orders, and you have promised to obey them."

Again there was no reply, and he began his counting, but he had not proceeded as far as the first five, when a tall cow-puncher named Longman stepped to the front, and, saluting in true military fashion, said:

"Beg pardon, cap, but I'll volunteer for that 'ere guard-duty, and if you'll just give me the privilege, I'll select four others to stay with me, because I think they'd ought to be five."

"All right," said Chick, "go ahead."

Longman turned his back to Chick, thus facing the scowling men, and when he did so he deliberately closed one eye, and held it thus for a considerable time before he spoke a word; and during that time a pronounced grin appeared as if by magic upon the stern features that confronted him.

Chick saw it, but he did not understand it, nor did he call for an explanation.

Ten minutes later the two companies of men had left the camp for the raid upon the outlaw den, and only Kid Curry, the outlaw chief, and his guard of five remained.

CHAPTER X.

THE ATTACK AT DAWN.

Among the gathering of Western men, such as the one which Chick had under his command, men who have spent their lives on the frontier, and who have learned woodcraft and prairie lore almost as thoroughly as the Indians themselves, there is always one or more among each group who possess the talent of mimicry almost to perfection.

You who read will remember particular boys with whom you played when the world was one of make-believe who could cackle like hens, or hoot like owls, or cry like blue jays, or whistle like the whippoorwill, and do it so well as to deceive the ears of those who did not know it to be an imitation.

This sort of signaling is familiar to all Indians, who can bark like coyotes, or foxes, or wolves, and who can imitate the animals and birds with which they are familiar to perfection.

Before these two divisions of Chick's forces parted to go their separate ways, it was agreed between them that certain signals should be given when each party had attained its desired position.

There were yet many hours of darkness remaining when the two expeditions started.

One of them—that one which had to travel around to the far side of the hilly district in the center of which the robbers' roost was located, needed time for the achievement of its purpose.

It was in perfecting these arrangements that the knowledge of the Indian chief, Gray Feather, was particularly advantageous to them, for he knew distances and locations by instinct, when he did not know them as the result of observation, and to the white man he was enabled to explain fully the direction and the trails they must follow in order to obtain the position they wished to occupy.

Chick and his party went directly back through the trail by which the prisoner had been brought into camp, and at the edge of the open glade, where Chick had encountered the Indian on his return, they halted, while the young detective, with Thornhill and two others, crept forward as silently as shadows toward the fringe of bushes which surrounded the entrance to the cavernous passageway at the opposite side of the depression.

Although they stopped frequently to listen, and at no time made any sound which could have been heard fifty feet away, they were aware of nothing to interfere with their progress as they approached, and the result was that presently Chick led them past the bushes and on into the tunnel, until at last they paused before the barred door, which was still in the condition in which Chick had left it.

For the first time since the young detective made his escape from that room, he recalled the fact that he had hurled Arizona, with all the strength he could command, bodily against the jagged rocks which formed the sides of the room, and he felt somewhat dismayed now at the thought that it was quite possible that he had killed Arizona then.

However, when they opened the door, and the four stood there grimly with their revolvers leveled toward the blackness of the interior, the light of the candle which Chick had retained possession of, and which he now held above his head, revealed Arizona awaiting them, apparently not much the worse for the rough handling he had received from Chick.

The proceedings which followed were characteristic of Western life, and of the cruel determination of the cow-punchers to exterminate, once for all, and before it had a chance to develop into anything more formidable, this outlaw gang.

There was not a word spoken.

Arizona, realizing that there was now no hope of his escape, uttered nothing, and the two men whom Chick and Thornhill had brought with them were too cautious of the man they had captured to waste their breath in spoken words.

These two stepped forward silently, while Chick and Thornhill stepped aside for them to act.

Arizona's wrists were bound together behind his back, loops were fastened around each ankle by a connecting rope which afforded only play enough for him to walk with mincing steps.

He was led out and away by these two men, while Chick and Thornhill followed, the latter barring the door after him again before his departure.

Outside, screened by the fringe of bushes around the entrance, the rest of the party waited in absolute silence, and it was then that Thornhill, placing his lips close to the ear of the young detective, whispered:

"Don't you think, Chick, it would be a good idea to send Pike and Sammy right along with Arizona back to the camp? They can deliver him to the five who are guarding the Kid, and then return, and we won't be hampered in our movements by his presence here, and Arizona won't have any chance to get away from us; see?"

"Yes," said Chick, in reply; "send him back."

The darkness was too intense for the young detective to notice the nudging of elbows which passed from one to another of his group of followers when the two men disappeared with their prisoner, to deliver him at the place where Kid Curry was under guard; probably, if there had been light enough to see, there would have been no nudging indulged in, only the exchange of grins among the men, as had been the case when the Kid was left behind them under guard.

Chick had yet a great deal to learn about the methods and ways of the Western cow-punchers, who regard cattle-thieving and horse-stealing as a capital crime, deserving of instant death.

And now the party headed by Chick and Thornhill silently took up its way again, and passed in Indian file into the tunnel, on its way to the valley of the outlaws that Chick had so strangely discovered.

Knowing the way so well, it was not necessary for Chick to carry a light, for he could lead them by keeping his arms outstretched and frequently touching the wall of the passageway on either side as he proceeded; and as for the others, they moved forward in a manner not unlike the lock-step, each man reaching out his

hand so he could touch the one in front of him, and so follow unerringly through the black darkness.

They came to the spherical rock, or, rather, the semi-sphere, manufactured of cement, and passed it, and then moved onward again, nor paused until Chick halted at the opening through which he had looked upon the outlaws, and there word was passed back along the line for the men to arrange themselves as comfortably as they might around the opening and await further orders.

The one question of indecision that was troubling Chick's mind at the moment concerned the present condition of his beloved chief, Nick Carter, and his only fear was that when the attack was made upon the outlaws, that Nick, if still alive, might be put to death at the very beginning of the defense.

It was true that the absence of the two leading spirits of the outlaw gang might prevent this serious result of the attack, and, anyhow, Chick realized that there was no other way for it but to proceed as he had begun.

It might be wondered why they did not proceed into the valley at once, as stealthily as they had come that far, and make the attack in the form of a surprise, while darkness still hung over the outlaw retreat.

But the keen eyes of the young detective and Thornhill had already discovered that the place was thoroughly sentineled, and they figured that to make an attack now, before Wallace Coburn had had sufficient opportunity to get his men in position at the other side of the valley, would result in the escape of many of the men whom they wished to capture.

But it did not prevent Chick from using all the generalship with which he was gifted, and presently he crept out into the open as far as he dared to go without fear of discovery by the sentinels, and from there studied the position with the keen understanding of a commanding officer; and when he returned to his men he divided the party into groups of three and four, and assigned to each a position along that side of the valley from which, at the word of command, the attack would be made.

Two of these groups were left to guard the entrance to the tunnel from the valley, and were ordered not to leave it unguarded for an instant, but to remain there even after the others charged upon the enemy.

It was now that Chick wished he had been able to bring Gray Feather with his own party, instead of sending him with Wallace Coburn; for, had the Indian chief been there, his wonderful adeptness at scouting would have been utilized by sending him crawling into the very heart of the camp before them, in search of Nick Carter himself.

Chick would have undertaken this mission himself had he not realized that it would be impossible for any one less expert than an Indian to accomplish it without discovery, for he did not forget that every one of the outlaws against whom they were spitted was as expert in all the sciences of the frontier plains and mountains and woods as his own men who were waiting to make the attack.

It made up a grim picture, indeed, had there been light enough to see it, those thirty men scattered in groups along the crescent-shaped side of the valley, clad in their frontier costumes, armed to the teeth, and awaiting only a signal from their commander to dash forward with implacable purpose to exterminate this gang of outlaws, who, if permitted to exist, would ruin the peace of their community, as well as their business.

The hour was now tending rapidly toward dawn. All the lighter section of sky over their heads was changing into blue-gray, which would brighten gradually into blue, and as the shadows dispersed more and more, the men drew back into the deeper ones, or flung themselves flat upon the ground, while they awaited the signal from the other side; and then, just at the moment when the light was advancing so rapidly that it seemed to Chick as though they would be compelled to make the attack without the aid of Wallace Coburn and his men, from the other side the signal came.

Instantly Jim Thornhill answered it by delivering the agreed-upon reply, and at once the men who followed Chick leaped to their feet, and with yells which stirred the mountain solitudes with the suggestion of an inferno, and which echoed and reechoed from rock to rock and from crag to crag with increasing volume, they rushed forward upon the unprepared outlaws, shooting and yelling and swearing as they advanced.

And at the same instant yells, mingled with the reports of firearms, came to them from the opposite side of the valley.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OUTLAWS' LAST STAND.

There were more than a hundred and fifty outlaws in that outfit—this fact was established later on—and there were something less than sixty men, as we know, in the

attacking-party. We must not forget that five men had been left behind to guard Kid Curry, and that two more had been sent back with Arizona.

Nevertheless, the men under the command of the young assistant to Nick Carter possessed two advantages which were not to be despised. They consisted in the facts that the attack was a complete surprise, and that it was made from two sides at once.

There was another advantage, also, which counted for something—the outlaws had no idea of the number that had been brought against them. They might have been outnumbered from both sides, and, indeed, the yelling and firing and shouting and other noises made by the cow-punchers when they rushed forward in the early dawn, to make the onslaught, suggested that there might have been a thousand of them.

Among the outlaws men seemed to spring up from everywhere at once. They leaped into view fully armed and prepared for the fight, too, for such men carry their lives on their sleeves, and sleep with their weapons ready to use.

They were fighters, too, else they would not have adopted the lives they had; they held life itself as nothing, and they realized the instant the attack was made that they had been surrounded, and that the result of it for them would be death if they did not fight their way through and escape.

If bullets from the pistols of the cow-punchers did not end their lives, ropes suspended from limbs of trees would. This would be their last stand. They knew that.

Imagine the awfulness of it all. To be awakened at dawn by a rush of men, armed and intent upon killing or capturing, and preferring the former to the latter, as giving less trouble and soonest over.

The outlaws missed their leaders, too. Kid Curry would have been a tower of strength to them, had he been there to direct them. Arizona would have been a power among them, had he been there, with his reckless daring, to shout encouragement to them.

But there were others as daring and almost as competent, who leaped to the front and called out orders to the momentarily demoralized outfit.

It was daylight by now up on the hills around them, but down there at the bottom of the valley it was yet gray, and things were seen indistinctly.

Both ways of escape were cut off from the hemmed-in scoundrels, and they knew it. Men attacked them from the approach to the tunnel and from the ravine through the hills, which would otherwise have been their best means of escape.

The din of it was frightful; the smoke of their weapons filled the valley, for there was no morning breeze to lift it and carry it away, and presently even the dim light of the early dawn was obscured by powder smoke.

There were hand-to-hand struggles going on everywhere, when outlaw and cattleman came together in the rush. Voices were stilled, however, for on both sides the men needed all the breath they had to carry them through the combat.

When Chick's followers rushed into the fight from one side of the valley, and Wallace Coburn's men dashed in from the opposite side, the outlaws were driven—or they rushed for it themselves—to the very center of the valley, where there was a high heap of rocks, like a miniature butte, on the top of which a small cabin of logs had been erected.

And here the fight centered.

It is not our purpose to relate how many fell in that terrific fight, nor to speak of the wounded. That such an attack could not be bloodless on either side is self-evident.

And presently it came to the point where the outlaws, at least all who were left, were concentrated upon the rocky height in the center of the valley, while the attacking-party completely surrounded it.

In the darkness of the night, when Chick reconnoitered the place, he had not been able to locate the cabin on top of the rocks, but now that he did see it, he called out to those nearest him, and asked them to pass the word along that Nick Carter was doubtless confined in that very place, as being the heart and the main strength of the stronghold.

Jim Thornhill fought steadily close beside Chick, for a bond of fraternal feeling had sprung up between them; and together, as if actuated by the same impulse, although no word of it had been uttered between them, they exerted every power they possessed to force themselves among the rocks and up to the cabin on the top.

There was one man among the outlaws who fought like a fiend.

He was a giant in stature, being certainly six inches

more than six feet tall, and built in proportion. It seemed that the outlaws looked to him for leadership, since their two chiefs were absent—and they could have selected none better in the emergency that was upon them.

And this man, whom not one of the attacking-party seemed to know, fought his way to the front at first. He fired his pistols until they were empty, and then, like the giant he was, he used his hands.

He would leap upon one of the men who formed the attacking-force, seize him in his mighty grasp, lift him into the air as if he were a featherweight, and use him as a missile to hurl at the others. Sometimes he used his fists, and wherever his terrible knuckles fell, the man they struck went down before them to rise no more during that fight.

He was like the Goliath of the Philistines returned to life again, and there seemed to be no David to oppose him.

He was a host in himself, and wherever he made his appearance in the fight, there the cow-punchers gave way before him.

A dozen shots had been fired at him, and not one seemed to have taken effect; several men had pitted themselves against him one by one, and each had been hurled aside as mere impedimenta in his pathway.

He was invulnerable, and apparently all-powerful.

Bob Coburn went up against him, and Bob was thrown into the air as if he were a child, to alight a dozen feet away, upon the heads of three of his own party, who were borne down with him; but they all struggled to their feet again, unhurt.

Jim Thornhill, nothing daunted, forced his way to the giant, and received a blow which, however, he managed to dodge so that it caught him on the shoulder, instead of coming against his head; but he said afterward that he felt as if he had been hit with an ax, and it was certain that he went through the rest of that fight with the use of only one of his arms.

Chick tried to reach him time after time, but each attempt he made was frustrated by one of his own men, who were bent upon protecting him as much as they could, and it was not until the outlaws had retreated step by step, and were huddled around the hill, halfway to the top, that the young detective finally came in contact with the Goliath of the outlaws.

We all know what Chick's powers are; we all know how he has been trained from early boyhood by Nick Carter, until he is almost as strong, almost as skilful, almost as doughty in every respect as his master.

But even he could not stand against the giant.

The blow that the huge fellow aimed at the young detective with his fist struck only the empty air, for Chick avoided it as easily as Jim Corbett ever dodged a swinging fist; and he darted forward quickly under the guard of the giant, and seized him around the body, believing that his science could gain the mastery over him.

But he might as well have seized upon a growing tree, or a sentinel rock.

All that he could do was to lift the giant off his feet, and this he managed to do once, while his own men who saw it cheered; but when he sought to turn the huge man over, and so throw him to the ground, Goliath landed squarely upon his feet again, and bellowed his jeering taunt at the others, like the grumbling of a maddened bull.

Then he stooped forward and seized Chick, lifted him, and flung him away from him, so that he was sent spinning down the sides of the rocky place like a top.

When the cow-punchers saw that they rushed forward en masse, as if by common consent, and hurled themselves a half-dozen at a time upon the giant; but the place of attack was so narrow that they could not aid one another with effect, and one by one they were in turn hurled aside, back again among their friends below.

What might this one man have accomplished had he been possessed of any sort of weapon; but he was not. His pistols empty, he had thrown them aside, preferring to use the arms that nature had given him, and he kept a space in front of him clear even while his own followers fell around him on every side, or were overcome and carried away to be bound.

At the top of the rock, directly surrounding the cabin that has been described, there was a clear, flat space, like the top of a table, in the center of which stood the cabin; and this space was perhaps fifty feet in diameter, and almost round.

It was called Kid Curry's Last Stand ever after that day, although the Kid himself was not there in person to assist his men in making the stand. He was making his last stand at another place, as the reader will presently learn; he and Arizona together.

During all the fight, ever since Chick had discovered the cabin on the hill, and had determined in his own

mind that Nick Carter was a prisoner inside of it, Chick had watched the small structure narrowly, while he had never once neglected an opportunity to fight his way closer to it.

And at last, when several of the attacking-party forced their way out upon the plateau that surrounded it, Chick was in their van, still striving.

The reports of firearms had long since died out. The loads in the chambers of the pistols were early exhausted, and neither side had been given a chance to reload a weapon, so fiercely had every inch of the ground been contested, and so closely, face to face, had been the combat from the very first.

And now, when some of the attacking-party reached the top of the rocks, and were on the plateau near the cabin, the entire struggle had resolved itself into a hand-to-hand fight in which strength alone could hope to win the mastery; and as the cow-punchers rushed to join their friends at the top, and each man picked out his opponent, the remarkable thing happened that they were exactly evenly divided—that there was just man to man all around the circle, and that there were just as many individual fights going on as there were pairs of men there—save that the giant was extra. *The giant alone, of all that fighting throng, was for the moment disengaged, and for that moment he held aloof from them all, while he reasoned with calculating eyes the probable outcome of this last stand at the top of the rocks.*

He had been as cool and implacable as he was fierce and powerful throughout, and Chick, much too busily engaged with the man who was opposed to him to do aught but fight it out where he was, saw the giant raise himself to his full stature and gaze contemplatively around at the fighting throng, smiling cynically, and evidently coolly regaining his breath, in preparation for another rush upon them, when his own great strength would carry the balance of power to the side of the outlaws, and so win the fight for them.

It was a terrible moment for the young detective, for he knew only too well what the result would be—that the giant's strength would turn the tide of battle the other way, and that the attacking-party would be overcome in the end if that huge fellow once threw himself into the fight again—and he knew that he was himself powerless to do anything to prevent it.

And then an amazing thing happened.

The door of the cabin, which faced toward where Chick was fighting, was pulled open suddenly, and a man who wore only his shirt and trousers rushed through it into the open, and halted there for just one instant, while he glanced light lightning around him, taking in the situation that confronted him, so that he might realize who were friends and who were enemies, that he might know where to make his own attack.

And that man who paused there before the door for one short instant was Nick Carter.

CHAPTER XII.

KID CURRY'S LAST STAND.

It seemed as if every man there, on both sides, saw the apparition in the doorway at the same instant, and that each one ceased his own efforts, in a measure, with the discovery, for there was a momentary hush in the noise of the combat, and an instant of pause in the fighting itself.

The direction of the eyes warned the giant that something was behind him, and he wheeled so that he faced Nick Carter before the detective had made up his mind who were his friends and who were his enemies. It must be remembered that he had come out of the darkness into the light suddenly, and that he had seen very few of the men who were really his friends until that moment.

When the giant wheeled so that he faced the detective, arrayed in nothing but shirt and trousers and boots, he understood at once what had happened, for the prisoner was, of course, not unknown to him.

He understood that the prisoner had managed to break his bonds, and to force his way to liberty, and that he had come out of the cabin to take part in the fight—and it is possible, too, that he understood that he had no mean antagonist in the detective, who had for many years been called the "Little Giant" for good and sufficient reasons.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he roared. "You, my friend! *You!*" and he took a step nearer to Nick.

The contrast between the two men was remarkable.

We all know that Nick Carter is not tall, neither does he give outward evidence of the wonderful strength he possesses, which is as great as Sandow's, and is directed by a perfect mastery of science. The giant who faced him now looked upon him as a pygmy, in comparison to

himself, for Nick did not compare in stature with some of the men whom the giant had already thrown into the air as if they were toys.

Nick did not make the attack at once.

He seemed, indeed, to wish to delay it as long as possible, for the purpose of breathing deeply and accustoming himself to the outer air, after his long confinement inside the cabin, and Chick noticed that he kept working his arms and legs while he stood there, as if he were forcing them into condition for the struggle that was to come.

For, doubtless, Nick also recognized in this giant who faced him a foeman who might overcome him; he doubtless realized that he would have use for every muscular power he possessed, for every trick of science that he knew, and for every particle of air that his lungs could absorb.

He replied to the giant, still in an effort to gain time, for time, just then, was his most valuable asset, until he could get his muscles and lungs into shape for the approaching combat.

"Yes; it is I," he replied coolly, "ready to fight you, Goliath. Come on!"

"To fight me! *You!*"

"Yes."

"Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho! Hear that, will you? You, fight me!"

"You are unarmed, and so am I," replied Nick, as coolly as before; "but big as you are, I am stronger than you, and I shall overcome you."

"Bah! You are like a bantam rooster—and you talk like one."

"I have seen bantams that whipped cocks twice their size, you big bunch of bones!"

"Ho, ho! And you know how to call names, too. Hear him! I'll eat you up, you fool! I will tear your arms out from the shoulders. I will break your legs across my knees, as I would do with dry sticks of wood."

"Do it, then. Now is your chance."

"Hear him! Hear him, men!"

The fighting around them had discontinued, and although each combatant warily watched his individual foe, all interest was concentrated upon this extraordinary scene in the middle of the plateau before the cabin door.

"It seems to be left for you and me to decide alone," said the detective coolly. "The others have stopped fighting. They are waiting for you to tear my arms out at the shoulders, and to break my legs across your knees. They are waiting for you to begin your meal. Why don't you attack me? Are you a coward, as well as a thief?"

Chick understood now that Nick wished the giant to make the first attack, for that would give him a slight advantage at the beginning.

"Do you really think that you can beat me?" demanded the giant, who seemed to wish to gloat over his enemy. He had always been used to frightening his foes, and he possibly believed that he could frighten Nick Carter.

"Yes, I do," replied the detective.

"Why don't you attack me, then?"

"I am waiting for you."

"Is it to be a wrestling-match, my bantam rooster?"

"It is to be anything that happens, and let the best man win, Goliath. I am playing with you now. I am getting my wind."

"Do you hear him, men?" called the giant to the others. "Do you hear him?"

"Sure we hear him," somebody called, in reply. "Go for him. Have it over. The rest will be easy."

"Then watch me! Watch me!"

Not more than three yards separated the giant and Nick when the former began slowly to advance, crouching low as he did so, and evidently preparing himself for a spring into the air, by which he intended to bear his opponent to the earth at once; and Nick saw his intention and smiled, for he thought he knew what would come of it.

And then the giant made the attack.

He did spring into the air, rushing forward at the same time; and Nick, waiting until the fellow's huge paws were almost upon him, ducked quickly, darted under the outstretched arms, and, wheeling, struck out with his fist so that the giant was sent reeling half-way across the plateau.

But although he staggered, he did not fall, and he managed to turn so quickly that Nick could not follow up the advantage the blow would have given him otherwise.

Goliath uttered a bellow of rage when he received the blow. A shout of exultation went up from the cowpunchers, and some of the outlaws laughed in derision, for even yet they had no doubts about the final outcome of the combat.

Again the giant and the detective faced each other,

the big man crouching as before, and Nick waiting coolly for him to repeat the mistake already made.

He did repeat it. He did dash forward and leap into the air almost exactly as he had done the first time; and this time the detective dodged in the opposite direction, and delivered a second blow, as telling as the first one; but so great was the strength of the giant, and so hard was his great head, that again he only reeled a distance away, and turned as he had done the first time.

Again he bellowed; again a cry of approval went up from Nick's friends; again some of the outlaws laughed aloud.

It all served to madden the brute, and that fact cost him some of his caution.

He dashed into the fight again the moment he turned, and, without crouching, rushed forward directly at the detective, with his great arms outstretched to seize him and crush him as he had boasted he would do.

But the arms did not touch Nick, for he slipped inside the guard and out again before the giant's grip could close upon him, and this time delivered a telling blow fairly upon the end of Goliath's nose, straightening him and staggering him backward a trifle, while the claret spurted from his nostrils.

And now he was blinded with rage—the condition in which Nick had hoped to get him.

He thought no more of the effect of his attack, but rushed into the fight with all his brute strength augmented by rage and fury—and somehow, despite the fact that he received three blows, one after another, that woud have knocked senseless an ordinary man, his brawny arms managed to seize upon and to hold the detective.

A roar of triumph came from him as he felt his fingers close upon the detective, and he pulled the slighter body toward him by main strength, until he was suddenly conscious that there was a terrific pressure around his own body, that was gradually squeezing the breath out of him, as if he had fallen into the toils of a mighty serpent.

He struggled to release himself, but could not accomplish it. He tried to tear himself loose from that awful grasp, and he could not. He even relinquished the hold that he had momentarily gained, and sought with his hands to tear away those coils of wirelike arms which were suffocating him; but he could not reach them, for they were behind him.

He tried to strike with his fists the detective's head, but Nick had managed to slip around the giant's body when the fellow's hold was released, and now he was out of reach of the huge fists, save for a few blows that fell so far short that they did no damage.

And then the giant felt himself lifted from his feet, clear of the ground.

He tried to call out for help, but he could not; there was not breath enough left in his great body.

And then the world grew black to him, and the ground seemed to rise and strike him all over at the same time, for Nick had turned him over, as if he were a cartwheel, and had dashed him head first upon the ground at his feet.

But already the fighting around him had recommenced, although now it was of short duration.

The outlaws realized that the game was up, and they were speedily overcome, captured, and bound.

The fight was over, and Nick Carter, although a prisoner when it began, had, nevertheless, been the one to win it finally.

Later, when Chick looked around him, he was amazed to discover that the five men he had left at the camp to guard the Kid, as well as the two who had been sent back there in charge of Arizona, were among those who had gathered around Nick Carter, to congratulate him upon his victory, and he was about to call to them, when Thornhill reached out a hand and stopped him.

"What is it, Chick?" he asked.

"I want to know what has become of the prisoners," replied Chick.

"I can tell you that."

"Well, what *has* become of them?"

"They have made their last stand, Chick—on nothing. That is usually the last stand of such as they were. Don't say a word. You don't know anything about it; but try to remember that you have laws in the East and we have laws in the big West. Some of ours may be unwritten, but they are effective. Let it go at that. Kid Curry has made his last stand—and so has the man who murdered your father. Forget it!"

THE END.

The next issue of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain, besides the usual departments, sketches, etc., a long complete story entitled "A Beautiful Anarchist; or, Nick Carter's Bravest Act."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

In the Indian Mutiny, an English resident at Delhi, who had been shot, held toward a Sepoy who was passing his well-lined purse for a drink from his flask. The Sepoy took the purse, and gave the water; but while the wounded man was raising it to his lips, the arm of the treacherous Sepoy was raised, and, ere the unfortunate Englishman could utter a word, a dagger lay buried in his quivering flesh. He was dead! and the asked for relief was clasped in his nerveless hand. But the assassin was not to escape. A wounded soldier, who lay near, turned in time to see the blow struck, and the blood kindled in his veins at the barbaric cruelty. Severely wounded as he was, he managed to raise himself, seize his revolver, and fire. As he fell back exhausted by the effort, he saw the Indian roll over, and knew he had meted out justice to a cowardly villain.

The lion in South Africa dreads the jackals that infest his native land. The latter hunt in packs, and when they meet the king of beasts, the lion generally succumbs in the terrific fight that ensues.

I well remember, on an intensely dark night, coming upon three or four lions whose roaring was very alarming. We could not see them, but we could hear them moving quite close to us.

Some of the party with loaded rifles peered about while the rest tried in vain to light a torch. At this point our guide advised us to imitate the cry of jackals in the distance. So we at once began doing so in an undertone.

The effect was surprising. There was the sound of a rapid stampede across the dry leaves. The lions decamped in a panic, driven off by the supposed approach of a pack of jackals. For the rest of the night our party was undisturbed.

Down in the deepest caverns of the ship is the great "stokehole," where the sixteen boilers generate their steam, and the furnaces beneath them belch and seethe with scorching heat. The thermometer registers from 140 to 170, and the men can only work an hour or two at a time. An inexperienced man would faint of exhaustion before his first watch was over. The slice bars which puncture and shove the molten masses in the furnaces blister the hands that hold them, and curling gaseous flames scorch the half-naked bodies of the firemen, and parch their eyes and crack their lips. Ashes and soot and soot and ashes are everywhere. Each projecting ledge is laden with them inches deep, and on the dripping bodies of the firemen they mingle in streaks of gritty paste that make these grimy, panting men look even more ghastly than they are.

The coal-trimmers, as they trundle their iron barrows from the bunkers in calm weather, or stagger under heavy loaded baskets when the ship is storm-tossed, are transformed by this flying dust into imps of blackness, and the long line of open, glowing furnces makes this awful place seem more terrible than Doré's picture of the sinner's hell.

Many of our readers would be interested could they see some of the strange things a writer discovered in delving around the archives in the Department of Agriculture in Washington. Hidden away in an obscure corner, is an odd sort of exhibit of queer foods eaten by out-of-the-way people. There is a loaf of bread made from the roasted leaves of a plant allied to the century-plant. Another kind of bread is from a dough of juniper berries. These are relished by some tribes of Indians, while others manufacture cakes out of different kinds of bulbs. The prairie Indians relish a dish of wild turnips, which civilized people would not be likely to enjoy at all. In the great American desert the "screw beans," which grow on mesquite bushes, are utilized for food. Soap berries furnish an agreeable diet for some savages in this country, while in California the copper-colored aborigines do not disdain the seeds of salt grass. Also in California the Digger Indians collect pine nuts, which are seeds of a certain species of pine—sometimes called "pinons"—by kindling fires against the trees, thus causing the nuts to fall out of the cones. At the same time a sweet gum exudes from the bark, serving the purpose of sugar. The seeds of gourds are consumed in the shape of mush by Indians in Arizona.

In addition to all these things the exhibit referred to includes a jar of pulverized crickets, which are eaten in that form by the Indians of Oregon. They are roasted, as are likewise grasshoppers and even slugs. These delicacies are cooked in a pit, being arranged in alternate layers with hot stones. After being thus prepared, they are dried and ground to powder. They are mixed with pounded acorns or berries, the flour made in this way being kneaded into cakes and dried in the sun. The Assiniboines used a kind of seed to stop bleeding at the nose. Among other curious things used for food are acorns, sunflower seeds, grape seeds, flowers of cattails, moss from the spruce fir-tree, and the blossoms of wild clover. The exhibit embraces a number of models representing grape seeds enormously enlarged. It is actually possible to tell the species of a grape by the shape of the seed. There is a jar of red willow bark which Indians mix with tobacco for the sake of economy. This, however, is only one of a thousand plants that are utilized in a similar fashion.

A native Samoan house is aptly described as a gigantic beehive, thirty-five feet in diameter, a hundred in circumference, and raised from the ground by a number of short posts at intervals of four feet from each other all round. The spaces between these posts, which may be called open doors or windows, all round the house, are shut in at night by roughly plaited cocoanut-leaf blinds.

The floor is raised six or eight inches with rough stones, then an upper layer of smooth pebbles, then some cocoanut-leaf mats, and then a layer of fine matting. In the center of the house there are two, sometimes three, posts, twenty feet long, sunk into the ground, and extending to and supporting the ridge-pole. These are the main props of the building.

The space between the rafters the natives fill up with what

they call ribs, the wood of the bread-fruit tree, split up into small pieces, and joined together so as to form a long rod the thickness of the thumb, running from the ridge-pole down to the eaves. All are kept in their places, an inch and a half apart, by cross-pieces made fast with sinnet, or rope made out of cocoanut fiber.

The thatch is laid on with great care and taste; the long, dry leaves of the sugar-cane are strung onto pieces of reed five feet long; they are made fast to the reed by overlapping the one end of the leaf and pinning it with the rib of the cocoanut leaflet run through from leaf to leaf horizontally. The reeds thus fringed with sugar-cane leaves hanging down three or four feet, are laid on, beginning at the eaves, and running up to the ridge-pole, each one overlapping its fellow an inch or so, and made fast, one by one, with sinnet, to the inside rafters.

Upward of a hundred of these reeds of thatch are required for a single row running from the eaves to the ridge-pole; another is then made, and so on all round the house. Two, three, or four thousand fringed reeds may be required for a good-sized house. The thatching, if well done, lasts for seven years.

To collect the sugar-cane leaves and "sew" the end onto the reed is the work of the women. An active woman can sew fifty reeds in a day, and three men will put up and fasten to the roof of the house some five hundred in a day.

The great objection to the thatch is that, in gales, it stands up like a field of corn, and then the rain pours into the house.

A great many people are under the impression that the substance of which meerschaum is made is washed up by the sea.

Probably they got that idea from the word, which signifies seafroth, but really the name originated from the fact that the clay, when dry, will float on the surface of the water and then appears like white, foamy bubbles. This clay is taken from beds in the solid earth.

In its primitive state it is white and soft, and you can cut it like cheese. It is found chiefly in Turkey and Hungary.

When the bowls of meerschaum pipes are new they look very much like ivory, but in using they gradually change into a mellow brown color, on account of the oil of the tobacco being absorbed by them in the process of burning.

To many boys it has always been a mystery how the fish can live when winter seals up ponds and lakes under a foot of ice. Fish do not breathe air, but the life-supporting constituent of air —oxygen gas—which is soluble in water to the extent of three volumes in one hundred at ordinary temperatures, and four in one hundred at freezing-point. The water containing the dissolved oxygen is made to pass over the gills, where it is separated from the blood only by a very thin membrane, through which the gas is able to pass. Fish in ice-bound rivers have to depend entirely upon this share of oxygen for their respiration, and if it becomes exhausted they are suffocated, just as we should be if deprived of oxygen. It rarely happens, however, that any considerable area of water is entirely covered with ice, especially in the case of rivers. Holes and cracks are almost sure to occur here and there, by which the oxygen of the air can reach the water and become dissolved in it. During a long frost, fish may always be found congregated beneath air-holes in large numbers. They have come there to breathe.

Nick Carter has always prided himself on the possession of wonderful vision, partly due to natural causes, and the fact that he has spent many years on plain and mountain.

Like every other sense, that of sight improves by use under healthy conditions, and, therefore, the people who have the greatest exercise of their vision in the open air, under light of the sun, have the best eyesight. Generally speaking, savage tribes possess the keenest eyesight, acquired through hunting.

Natives of the Solomon Islands are very quick at perceiving distant objects, such as ships at sea, and will pick out birds concealed in dense foliage some sixty or seventy feet high. Shepherds and sailors are blessed with good sight; the Esquimaux will detect a white fox in the snow a great distance away, while the Arabs of the deserts of Arabia have such extreme powers of vision, that on the vast plains of the desert they will pick out objects invisible to the ordinary eye at ranges from one to ten miles distant.

Among civilized peoples, the Norwegians have better eyesight than most, if not all, others, as they more generally fulfil the necessary conditions. The reason why defective eyes are so much on the increase in this and many European countries lies in too much study of books in early life, and in badly lighted rooms.

At Spitzbergen the longest day is three and one-half months.

At Wardbury, Norway, the longest day lasts from May 21 to July 22, without interruption.

At Tornea, Finland, June 21 brings a day nearly twenty-two hours long, and Christmas one less then three hours in length.

At St. Petersburg, Russia, and Tobolsk, Siberia, the longest day is nineteen hours, and the shortest five hours.

At Stockholm, Sweden, it is eighteen and one-half hours in length.

At Hamburg, in Germany, and Dantzig, in Prussia, the longest day has seventeen hours.

At London, England, and Bremen, Prussia, the longest day has sixteen and one-half hours.

At New York the longest day is about fifteen hours, and at Montreal, Canada, it is sixteen hours.

FERRETING OUT A MURDER.

BY EMERSON BENNETT.

In 1871, one Joseph Kidder, a farmer residing in Springfield township, Massachusetts, sold all his property for the purpose of removing to and settling in the West.

He was then a man about forty years of age, a widower, without children, and had no relation in that section of the country, with the exception of a half-brother and his family, with whom, though not exactly on unfriendly terms, he was not very intimate.

Joseph Kidder, in fact, was an eccentric person; and, though of good habits and morals, and strict integrity, he said and did a good many things that in another would not have been so readily overlooked.

It was known that he sold his farm for twenty-five hundred and twenty-six dollars, and received the cash for it; and it was also known that he deposited fifteen hundred dollars in a Springfield bank; and it was further supposed that he took the remainder with him when he went away.

After this, nothing was heard from him for a couple of years, when, in the fall of 1873, his half-brother, William Kidder, received a brief, characteristic epistle, or note, from him, in his own handwriting, mailed at Jefferson City, Missouri, in which he merely stated that he had purchased a farm in that section, was about to draw the balance of his money from the bank at Springfield, and should probably never return to the East.

A month or two later William Kidder, on inquiring at the bank, was informed that his brother's deposit had all been withdrawn; and this was the last knowledge he had of him, till, as a detective, I was employed to trace him out, living or dead.

The cause which led to this search was a matter of property.

In 1877, an uncle, one Amos Kidder, a rich bachelor, of Boston, died, bequeathing to each of the half-brothers—both his own nephews—the sum of twenty thousand dollars—conditional, in the case of Joseph, that, if not living, or if subsequently dying without issue, the amount should revert to William and his heirs.

Leaving out brotherly affection, and viewing the affair solely in a mercenary light, it became a matter of great importance to find Joseph Kidder, if living, or get positive proof of his death, and for this purpose William caused advertisements to be inserted in all the leading St. Louis and Jefferson City papers, and all the local weeklies for miles around, asking for information concerning the missing heir.

After waiting a few months, and getting no response of any kind, he came to me, stated the case in full, and said he wished to employ me to go to Jefferson City and make a thorough search, not only through that town, but, if necessary, through all the surrounding country, and obtain some positive information concerning his brother.

"It may cost months of labor, Mr. Kidder," said I, "and a good deal of money, and result in nothing, after all."

"I've calculated all about that, Mr. Harper," was his reply, "and I expect it all may be as you say; but it's got to be done, either by you or somebody else, and, from all I've heard about you, I'd rather have you, if you'll undertake it."

So we settled the preliminaries, and I immediately set about my task.

First obtaining a full and minute description of the personal appearance of Joseph Kidder when he left the East, but failing to get either a photograph or daguerreotype—for the reason that the eccentric man would never have one taken—I repaired to the bank from which he had drawn his deposit, and ascertained that it had been paid to the order of a bank in Jefferson City; and this fact, and his letter to his brother, mailed at the same place, were the only clues I had to guide me even to a beginning of my search.

Well, I went to Jefferson City, and commenced a systematic course of proceeding—among other things visiting all the hotels and public places where it was possible for a stranger to register his name—but without finding any trace of Kidder anywhere.

Then I visited all the eating and drinking-saloons and small shops of trade, and made thorough inquiries everywhere if any one had ever heard of a person of that name, but received a negative answer in every instance.

I even set the authorities to work by offering a handsome reward for any trace of the man I sought.

I had not neglected the bank, that having been one of the first places I had visited; but though their books showed the transaction of drawing and paying the money over to one Joseph Kidder, no one could remember so far back anything about the personal appearance of the man who had received it, and no one could tell what had become of him after he had left the premises.

The paying-teller of that particular date, however, was no longer an officer of the bank; and, just to have something to follow up, I procured his address, determined, if everything else failed, to pay him a visit.

I subsequently found him in an adjoining town, engaged in bookkeeping; and, on my making known to him the importance of my search, he replied that he would readily assist me if he could, but that all he could remember of the transaction was the fact that the man to whom the money had been paid had lost the first joint of his thumb on his left hand, and had it covered with leather, and that it seemed to him, in looking back, as if the party was dark-complexioned, with dark hair and eyes, and not light, as I had described Kidder.

Dark-complexioned, with a mutilated thumb!

This was the first thing that aroused a suspicion in my mind that Joseph Kidder had not been represented at the bank by Joseph Kidder himself, but by some other person.

And if by some other person, where was Joseph Kidder, then?

Dead, perhaps—murdered, perhaps.

But what was the good of this far-drawn suggestion?

If Joseph Kidder was dead at the time his Springfield deposit was drawn, who drew it? and what chance had I of finding out anything about his personator, of whom nobody knew anything beyond this clerk's recollection of the missing thumb?

Well, it was something to think about and ponder over; and I was not unmindful of the fact that a very faint suspicion and a very feeble clue had sometimes brought about most wonderful and startling results by being seized upon and followed up step by step by persons of my profession.

In sooth, in looking back at some of my own exploits, I am led to marvel at the curious ways in which I have got at wonderful secrets, and I am tempted at times to reverently believe that there is a higher power at work, using me as an humble instrument to complete the ends of justice by bringing the evil-doers to a proper punishment for their crimes.

Having finished my work in the city, I now set out to visit the surrounding country, and, on one pretense or another, to call at the different farmhouses within a radius of fifty miles, always keeping my eyes and ears open, and a sharp lookout for a man with a joint wanting to his left thumb.

It is true that Kidder might have lost his thumb and darkened his complexion and hair, but, even if so, I would be quite as well satisfied to find him as his murderer.

I am not going to detail all I said and did in that region for the next two months; for besides the fact that this would fill a volume, it might not prove of sufficient interest to the reader to repay a perusal.

Suffice it, therefore, to say that one day, while passing through a village about twenty miles from Jefferson City, my eye chanced upon a man who, while talking to another, had his left hand resting on a telegraph-pole.

As it was my business to take sharp notice of everybody, I looked keenly at him, and saw he was of dark complexion; and then, casually glancing at his hand, I perceived that the thumb was gone at the first joint.

This fact suddenly roused up all my interest—for though the man might not be the one I was seeking, I determined from that moment to know all about him.

By a long series of inquiries, so carefully guarded and casually propounded as not to excite any surprise or even curiosity as to my motive, I learned at different times, from different parties, what I will now condense into a few words.

The man's name was Asa Slingsby. He was about forty-five years of age. He lived between three and four miles from the village, on a farm of his own on a back country road. He was well to do, and had within the last few years inherited a handsome sum of money. He was a widower, without children, and since his wife's death, in 1872, he had lived alone, working a small portion of his farm himself, and renting out the rest. He was not generally well liked, though he could make himself very agreeable when he chose. He was greedy and miserly, was very fond of money, and always ready to drive a hard bargain. It was thought he would sell his farm if more than its value were offered him in ready cash.

I did not remain long in the village, but went away, studied over the matter for a few days, arranged my plan of operations, prepared myself in every way for what might either prove to be nothing, or else a perilous undertaking; and one night, near sunset, dressed as a respectable traveler, I stopped at Asa Slingsby's dwelling, found him chopping some sticks in his dooryard, and asked him how far it was to a tavern where I could put up with safety—remarking that I was an entire stranger in that section of the country, and that, having a good deal of money about me, with which I intended to purchase a farm, I did not care to trust myself in any doubtful quarters.

He looked at me sharply, and I fancied I saw the devil of cupidity in his eyes.

"It's nigh four miles to the tavern of the highest village, stranger," he said, "and the road arn't none o' the best and none o' the safest."

"And I'm so tired, too," I said dolefully. "What shall I do?"

"I lives alone here, and does my own cooking," he answered; "but if you could put up with plain supper and breakfast, I reckon I mought accommerdate yer with purty fair lodgings."

As this was exactly the proposition I had hoped and expected him to make, of course I readily and gratefully accepted it.

From that moment we got on very rapidly and pleasantly in our acquaintance.

He had a farm to sell for ready cash, and I had the ready cash to buy it.

"But I'd want three thousand down," he said, "and I reckon you arn't carrying that much?"

"No, I've only got about two thousand with me," said I; "but if I like your farm when I come to see it in daylight, I can soon get the other thousand from York State, where I belong."

His wicked eyes glittered.

"Don't you know nobody in these here diggings that mought lend it to yer?" he asked.

"Not a soul," I replied, knowing that he only asked the question to be sure of his ground.

He smiled a fiendish smile and turned the conversation.

I was satisfied now that he intended to murder me that night, as he had perhaps murdered Joseph Kidder years before—subsequently accounting for having an extra amount of money by saying he had just inherited it.

I was prepared for everything, though.

When he showed me to a spare bedroom, and a decent-looking bed, I took the light, bade him good night, and requested him to call me early, as I was a very sound sleeper.

I then hurriedly made a dummy out of the bedclothes, covered it over in the position of a sleeping man, put out the light, and crawled under the bed myself—where, with my dark lantern, my two revolvers, and a large bowie-knife, I anxiously awaited events.

A little past midnight I fancied I heard my room door softly open, and I affected to snore.

Then soft footsteps glided across the floor to my bed, and a moment or two later I heard a heavy blow upon the dummy above me, as a sharp ax was buried in what the assassin supposed to be the head of myself.

Then, before he could ascertain his mistake, I flashed my lantern upon his legs, and hamstrung him with my bowie-knife.

As he dropped to the ground, with a yell of pain and fright, I was upon him, with the muzzle of my revolver fairly jammed between his teeth.

"Quick, Asa Slingsby," I yelled, without giving him a moment for thought, or recovery from his astounding fright, "tell me what you did with the body of Joseph Kidder, or I'll blow your infernal brains out this instant!"

"In—in—the—well!" he gasped out.

"You hear, men?" said I.

"We hear! we hear!" replied the voices of a couple of constables, with whom I had previously arranged to be on hand and rush in at the first alarm.

That night we took the murderer to the county jail.

The next day men were set to work to dig out an old closed-up well.

They found three skeletons, with some clothes that were subsequently identified as having belonged to the missing Joseph Kidder.

The clerk, who had once been teller, identified Slingsby as the man to whom he had paid the Kidder money.

It turned out, on investigation, that Asa Slingsby was an accomplished penman and forger; and, though assuming to be illiterate, was really well educated.

It is supposed that he had in some way fallen in with Kidder, gained his confidence, wormed out his history, and, after murdering him, had found the letter to his half-brother, sent it on, and had boldly forged the draft which had brought the money into his own hands.

But Asa Slingsby was never legally tried for his crimes.

The people in that region became terribly excited over the revelations which had been made, banded together into a mob, broke into the jail, dragged the culprit out, and hanged him by the neck till dead, without even so much as saying "God have mercy on his soul!"

Without wishing to vainfully boast of my exploit, I think I may venture to cite it as one example among many of what may be done by pluck, energy, and perseverance in ferreting out a secret and long-concealed murder.

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